

alfred

CC

HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

JUNE 24, 1981 \$1.25
UK 85p



11 Delicious
Stories from
Alfred Hitchcock



A DAVIS PUBLICATION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alfred

352 pages

Hitchcock's Anthology

SPRING-SUMMER 1981 EDITION

\$2.50

UK £1.60

VOLUME 8

28

stories from the
Master of
Suspense

Donald E.

Westlake

Jack Ritchie

Harold Q.

Masur

John Lutz

Clark Howard

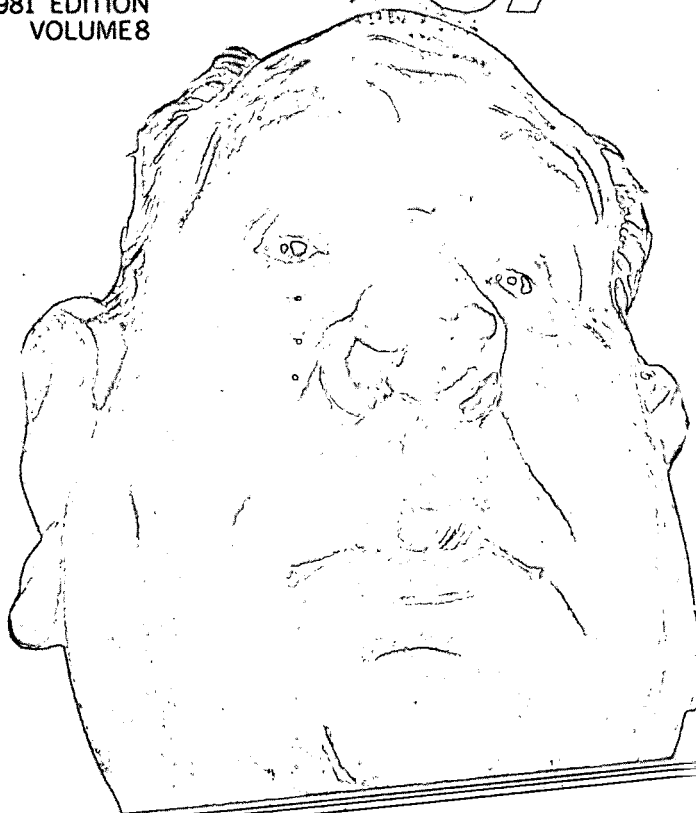
Edward D. Hoch

Charlotte

Edwards

Lawrence Block

and others



It's here! 28 tales that meet the
shiverious standards you have come to expect.
Ordering coupon on page 47.

LICENSED TO UNISYS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alfred
HITCHCOCK'S
 mystery magazine

NEXT
 ISSUE
 ON SALE
 JUNE 25

SHORT STORIES

THE CONFRONTATION SCENE <i>by William Bankier</i>	4
PARTLOW'S OWL <i>by Gary Alexander</i>	18
RETIREMENT JOB <i>by Michael Scott Cain</i>	26
A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION <i>by Donald Olson</i>	35
THE BLACK BOX <i>by Herschel Cozine</i>	48
THE OPAL NECKLACE <i>by Pauline C. Smith</i>	56
THE TIMETABLE <i>by Stephen Wasylyk</i>	67
AN HONEST LIVING <i>by Jeffry Scott</i>	81
STAY OF EXECUTION <i>by Louise Brownlee</i>	91
THE DEAR DEPARTED <i>by Robert Lopresti</i>	99
THE COURAGE OF AKIRA-KUN <i>by Ron Butler</i>	106

MOVIES AND TELEVISION

CRIME ON SCREEN <i>by Peter Christian</i>	121
-------------------------------------------------	-----

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 26, No. 7, June 24, 1981. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc. at \$1.25 a copy. Annual subscription \$16.25 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$18.50 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, OH 43305. Controlled circulation postage paid at Dallas, PA. © 1981 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. ISSN: 0002-5224

- ☐ the challenge of "whodunit"?
- ☐ creaking doors and things that go bump in the night?
- ☐ steadily mounting suspense?
- ☐ a touch of the macabre...the thrill of the chase...spy vs. counter spy?
- ☐ the sudden twist of plot and a quick surprise ending?

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Enjoy a variety of chills and challenges every month with up to 13 new spine tingers in the Hitchcock tradition. Get regular short stories and novelettes by today's top authors—Edward D. Hoch, Jack Ritchie, William Bankier, Nedra Tyre, John Lutz, Robert Whoby and many more.

And start with this money-wise introductory offer!



AHMM • Box 1932 • Marion, Ohio 43305

Send me AHMM at the rate checked below.

- ☐ **Special—6 issues at \$6.97!**
☐ ***Double the value with 12 issues at \$13.94!***

☐ Payment of \$_____ enclosed. ☐ Bill me later. *Outside U.S.A. and possessions:* 6 issues—\$8.00 12 issues—\$16.00

☐ Charge to my ☐ VISA ☐ Master Charge

[illegible]

Your Signature: _____

(Only the 12 issues for \$13.94 offer can be charged to your bank cards.)

Your name _____

Address

City

State

Zip

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first copy.

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



June 24, 1981

Dear Reader:

What happens when criminals get too old to ply their trade? In Michael Scott Cain's story you'll read about a small-time crook's "Retirement Job." Gary Aléxander tells us about a bartender's unusual personal pension fund in "Partlow's Owl."

Then there are family concerns. A young man returns home from the Army to fight for his brother's life in "Stay of Execution" by Louise Brownlee, and a cop has the difficult task of investigating the death of his ex-girl friend's mother in Stephen Wasylyk's "The Timetable." A family of actors finds too much togetherness can be deadly in William Bankier's "The Confrontation Scene." And you'll meet for the first time a new detective family—including a Japanese policeman and an American businessman—in "The Courage of Akira-Kun" by Ron Butler.

Good reading.

The Editors

Joel Davis, President & Publisher
Eleanor Sullivan, Editor

Susan Calderella Groarke
Victor C. Stabile
Leonard F. Pinto
Carole Dolph Gross
Constance DiRienzo
Barbara Bazyn
Jim Cappello
Carl Bartee
Carole Dixon
Don Gabree
Joseph W. Rowan
R. V. Enlow
Eugene S. Slawson
Rose Wayner

Associate Editor
Vice President & Secretary/Treasurer
Vice President & General Manager
Vice President, Marketing & Editorial
Exec. Sec., Rts. & Perm. Mgr.
Assistant Editor
Advertising Manager
Production Director
Production Manager
Newsstand Circulation Director
Newsstand Sales Manager
Subscription Circulation Director
Subscription Circulation Manager
Classified Advertising Director

Ralph Rubino, Art Director

Julian Carsfield was losing touch with reality . . .

THE CONFRONTATION SCENE

by
**WILLIAM
BANKIER**



Julian Carsfield clapped his hands. The actors came to order, turned, and looked across the stage apron to where he was standing on a chair. They were like his school children; they wanted to be led.

"That was the worst dress rehearsal I've ever seen," he said cheerfully. "It should mean a fine opening night."

Betty Dolan stood splay-footed, her hands resting on her generous abdomen. This wasn't costuming, she really was pregnant.

"It's only three-thirty," she said. "Can't we do Act One again?"

The others hesitated. On a Sunday afternoon, amateur-dramatic-society members like to be finished early and off home. Danny Dolan spoke for them all when he said, "I don't want you overdoing it, my dear."

She dismissed him with a thrust of her chin. "I'm sorry I married you."

"Good thing you did though." He patted her tummy with a paternal hand and everybody laughed.

Carsfield's broad freckled face remained aimed at the stage like a radar dish until order was restored. He was a remote, unbuttoned man, reticent, absent-minded. After evening rehearsals he had to be dragged away from the hall or he would ramble on indefinitely. His pupils at the school in south London were amused by his foggy manner, but they liked the way he was always organizing things for them to do. They sensed that Carsfield lived for them. The dramatic society felt the same thing.

"No more rehearsal today," he proclaimed. When he took charge, Carsfield's shy murmur became a stentorian boom. "We open in four days—I may arrange a run-through before then. But today I have organized a little celebration."

Griffith Mooney snatched the dead pipe from between his teeth. "Gone to practically no expense, I can assure you." The pipe went back with a click.

There was a stir of anticipation onstage. Free wine at somebody's house, a spontaneous booze-up—not the least of the reasons why they belonged to the society.

"So if you'll get out of your costumes quickly," Carsfield said, "you'll discover that transport has been laid on."

In the interval of anarchy that followed, Meredith Hay had time to wonder if she'd done the right thing in granting Carsfield the use of her summer house on the island. It was only an hour's drive to the coast and the launch had been set up by telephone. The novelty of the adventure would please everybody, but there was something desperate about the director's secrecy.

Meredith was closer to Carsfield than any of the others. It was she who dragged him away at the end of rehearsals and drove him home in her car. Sometimes they parked and talked about his life now that his parents were dead or about her existence with a husband whose business success provided all the satisfaction he needed. Twice they had made love. On the other nights they'd exchanged one innocent kiss on parting.

"Ready to go?" Carsfield drifted up behind Meredith, barely audible again, the apologetic intruder.

"I put two baskets of food and drink in the minibus," she said. "And here's the key to the summer house."

He took the key from her, pocketed it, and led the way to the stage door. It was the first time she had seen him in a hurry to proceed anywhere.

It had been clear to Meredith for some weeks that once again Julian Carsfield was losing touch with reality. You couldn't call it going mad, an expression which suggested foaming at the mouth. Carsfield remained calm in these phases he went through, but he tended to say things that made no sense in the context of the conversation.

Once, at a society dinner, he got up from the table without warning, pale-faced and tight-lipped, and stalked from the dining room, not to return that evening. Meredith, his unofficial apologist, dispelled the shock on that occasion by saying, "Well, we are a *dramatic* society, aren't we?"

The minibus raced along open highway to the south coast, crowded and twittering like an aviary. The cast had been persuaded to leave their cars in the parking lot at the hall. Ahead lay a chance to expand, to drink and eat, to touch and be touched in ways they could only dream of through the week.

"They'll be missing me at home," Echo Templeton said plaintively. Her Liverpool accent with its Irish overtone never failed to arouse merriment in the south of England. It could not be trusted on stage, so she filled the role of prompter.

"Don't fret," Griffith Mooney said. "They'll read about you in the papers tomorrow. 'Ravished beauty washed up on beach.'"

This prediction opened the gates to a flood of talk about sudden violent death and the cast chattered on happily all the way to the boathouse and private pier where a villager who knew the Hay family and looked after their boats was standing by.

"Here's the key," he said. "She's running well and there's petrol to spare for the return trip. Quiet water between here and the island. Have a good time."

Carsfield slipped into the role of captain, took charge of the key, saw his people aboard the luxurious craft, and soon had the engine rumbling confidently. The island could just be seen, a grey dot on the southern

horizon. With the throttle two-thirds open, Carsfield covered the distance in a little over an hour. Somebody managed to open a bottle of Italian red wine on the way. They were singing as they tied up at a wooden pier and straggled up the steep path to Summerheath.

"I feel as if I've died and gone to heaven," Danny Dolan said when a satisfying meal of cold cuts and cheese had failed to diminish his wine-inspired glow.

"That happens later," his wife said, "when Julian makes us swim home."

"You'd be all right," Mooney said. His pipe was actually lit and emitting the smell of a burned-out warehouse. "You've got all that extra buoyancy."

"I'll thank you to speak well of my wife," Dolan said.

"Well of your wife."

"Thank you."

As the sun went down, but with plenty of light left in the summer sky, they drifted outside onto the lawn in front of the house. It was a rambling one-story structure, soundly built, with a huge circular roof of tile on brick pillars.

"'In Xanadu,'" Mooney orated, "'did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree . . .'"

Dolan took up the quotation. "'Where Alph, the sacred river, ran . . .'"

"Alf is the name of my landlord," Echo Templeton mused. "He'll be wondering where I am."

"Give her a drink," Betty Dolan said through the groans.

"I don't want to be a bad hostess," Meredith said, "but it's going to be dark soon. We should start back."

That was when Carsfield astounded them all. As calmly as if he had been announcing an extra rehearsal, he said, "We aren't going back. We're staying here."

The discussion that followed began as good-humored disbelief. Then, when Carsfield explained himself and convinced them he wasn't joking, it turned into a serious argument with philosophical overtones. Actors enjoy probing motivation. Primed with free wine, they can sustain the dialogue for a long time.

They all saw Carsfield's point and sympathized with him. As director, he took possession of a play from the outset. By casting them in the

various roles, he gave the production its appearance and sound, he dictated the way it would move on stage. While rehearsals went on, the play remained his. He guided its development, changed it slightly from one week to the next, saw it evolve into a creation of which he could be proud.

"I'm not joking," he said. "The production is my baby. I nurture it. I think about it last thing at night and first thing in the morning."

"We understand," Danny Dolan said, holding the hand of his pregnant wife. "It's like your own living thing."

Meredith Hay shivered and folded her arms. It was not just the night chill; Julian was slipping into his raving phase. Last time she'd heard him as wide-eyed and articulate as this, he'd ended up not teaching school for a month while he calmed down at home on a program of medication.

"Until dress rehearsal," Carsfield went on, "the production is still mine. Then suddenly it's taken away from me—it belongs to you, the actors, and partly I suppose to the audience. The curtain goes up and you take it and do what you will. I can only watch what once was mine slipping away from me." He stood on the porch steps like an ambassador, addressing them with one hand in the pocket of his tweed jacket, the other raising a goblet of wine to his lips more frequently than was customary.

"We're with you," Meredith said. It was time to nip this fantasy in the bud. "But can't we talk about it another time? Who's for the launch?"

Before the others could respond and as Meredith moved onto the sloping path, Carsfield stopped her in her tracks. "I have the keys and I'm keeping them. The launch goes nowhere."

Griffith Mooney gave his stagey Australian laugh. "Come on, mate, we all have places to go. Let's not play games."

"It's no game. I intend to keep hold of this production as long as I can. It won't be stolen like all the others."

"That's enough, Julian." Danny Dolan left his wife and moved toward the director. "Give me the keys."

The gun came out of Carsfield's pocket in a fluid, practiced way. "Don't come one step closer." The penetrating voice confirmed what they had always known—that Julian could be a better actor than any of them had he not preferred to direct. "Please understand that I am serious about this. We stay on this island as long as I say and we rehearse the play until I am ready to let it go."

After a pause, Mooney laughed again and said, "What a performance! He's bluffing, of course."

Dolan took a step forward, then froze as the gun fired and a bullet smashed into the trunk of an elm at the edge of the lawn.

"Damn it, I'm not bluffing." Expertly, Carsfield altered his tone from anger to patience. "This can be an interesting experience for all of us. Please don't turn it into a tragedy."

Later, with rooms assigned in the house, the cast gathered in the kitchen. Echo Templeton was in tears. "Can't we telephone somebody?"

"There's no telephone," Meredith said. "We keep this place isolated."

"We'll get pretty bloody hungry if it goes on too long," Mooney grumbled. "We should have conserved the food we brought."

Meredith went to a freezer cabinet and lifted the lid. "There's enough for a few days. Julian asked me if there was food here. Now I know why." She smiled ruefully. "But besides instant coffee, all there is to drink is wine."

"Let zem dreenc wine," Mooney proclaimed in a cartoon French accent.

"This is madness," Dolan said, his voice falsetto with frustration. "He *can't* just kidnap the lot of us."

"He's keeping us from kidnapping his production," Meredith said gloomily. She had seen the logic of Julian's argument and the fact that it was indeed madness did not weaken his position.

"There isn't much we can do while he's got that gun," Betty Dolan said. She yawned—the placid, pregnant wife. "Can we go to bed?"

"We'll overpower him when he's sleeping," Mooney suggested. "I need two volunteers. You and me, Dolan."

"He's sleeping in the master bedroom with the door locked," Meredith informed them. "It's solid oak. Ten strokes with an axe, minimum."

"Then we'll just have to surprise him and get the gun from him in the morning," Echo Templeton said. "The poor man should be in hospital."

"You'll have your chance at ten o'clock," Meredith said. "He's called a rehearsal then in the main salon."

After breakfast, they straggled from the kitchen into the large room at the front of the house where Carsfield was seated behind a table at one end of the room. The gun was on the table in front of him and his eyes had a glossy, alert look. Meredith decided he was on some kind of uppers.

He had moved the furniture around into the positions required for the

stage setting. When the cast trooped in, he took the gun in his right hand, cradling it in his left. "Good morning," he said in his most authoritarian voice. "I hope you slept well. I expect you to give me a good rehearsal."

Mooney tried a German accent this time. "Discipline at Fort Summerheath," he snarled, "will be harsh."

"Don't be a silly ass, Major," Carsfield said. He had stopped using their real names, addressing them most of the time as the characters they played. "Your role is weaker than anybody's. Can we begin with Act One, Scene One, please? Watch your pacing, pick up the cues. I want to take a timing."

Meredith felt that she, as the person closest to the director, was obliged to make an effort. "Julian, there's no point. The play opens in three days in south London and we're all here."

"Let me worry about that."

"What about the people who are worried about us? I'm only one, but I *have* got a husband—"

"That's news to Julian," Mooney said in a waspish tone. He had taken a bottle of wine to bed with him. Now he was in a manic mood.

"People have gone missing before now," Carsfield said. "The fact that several of you have disappeared at once doesn't change things much. I doubt if anybody will make the connection for a couple of days. The police certainly won't get involved before then."

They had no choice but to rehearse. The men, after consultation over breakfast, remained alert for any opportunity of jumping their captor. But Carsfield didn't move onto the stage area. He stayed at his table. When anyone approached him, he backed off, gun in hand, and put his back to a wall.

They rehearsed all morning and then the girls prepared lunch while the men drank in the lounge. Carsfield sat by himself on the lawn under the elm tree the bullet had gone into last night. Meredith brought him a tray, having been told he would not eat with the others.

With her, he seemed more himself. He put the gun at his side and helped himself to a chicken sandwich. She squatted on the ground a yard away and watched him eat. If she picked her moment and moved quickly enough, she might get the gun. But betraying Julian in this way seemed out of the question. There had to be another way of persuading him to let the play—and the players—go. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Still a little troubled. The Major keeps masking Uncle Ben during his main speech in Act Two."

"I mean yourself. You've seemed tense recently."

"I was holding my breath over this affair. Now that it's working, I'm fine."

Meredith took a wedge of tomato from the tray and let the time that passed while she ate it draw them closer together. "But, Julian, they aren't characters in a play, they're real people. They aren't the Major and Uncle Ben. They happen to be Griffith Mooney and Danny Dolan."

His smile was one of mild exasperation. "I know that."

"Do you know how you're disturbing them? Upsetting their lives? You have no right to take them over."

"How about people upsetting *my* life?"

"When you agree to direct a play, that's part of the bargain. You put yourself into it and in the end the actors run away with it. You have to accept that."

"It isn't only the plays. It's the same thing at the school." Carsfield's face hardened; only his pale-blue eyes were vulnerable. It was as if the freckled face was a copper mask and behind it a soft, defenseless thing peered out furtively through two oval apertures.

"Year after year I start with a new crop of boys. They're a grotty bunch, most of them, with their scabby knees and the way their hair smells when I stand over them. One or two are slightly civilized. Then, as the months go by, I begin to know them." Carsfield had finished eating but he swallowed now with difficulty. "They're all unique, you see—different little characters. By Christmas they've become Simon with his jokes and Clive with half an apple in his pocket. Silly brute, he eats half and tucks the rest away inside that filthy pocket. I find I'm counting the days during the holiday, anxious to get back to them."

"Julian—"

"Then, before I know it, the year is over. They're so anxious to get away they don't look back. I watch them go and realize I'll never see them again. Because even when I do run into them and they call out 'Hello, sir!' they aren't the same. They've grown and changed."

Meredith moved next to him, took his hand in both of hers. The gun lay closer to her than to him. "I never realized—you're lonely."

Carsfield said nothing, but he looked at Meredith and smiled and his eyelids lowered gently and rose again. She knew it as his expression of

assent for situations when words would be uncomfortable. She had seen him use it to grant permission for an actor to refuse a part. The boys in his class probably took it as evidence that "sir" was letting them go to the playing field.

Later, in the house, Danny Dolan was hopping with frustration. "You had him! We were watching you! Why didn't you grab the gun?"

"He's in trouble," Meredith said quietly.

"He's in trouble?" Griffith Mooney snatched his glass from the mantelpiece and turned away. "I'm an accountant. I have clients expecting me to audit their books."

"This is important for him. And we aren't really being hurt. I can't say more." Meredith looked for support. "I think we should show tolerance."

"It's bloody against the law!" Mooney barked as he stormed out of the room.

When he reappeared, his entrance was startling. The others were on stage preparing to run through a scene and Carsfield was at his table when Mooney strode across the room dressed only in his shorts.

"Anyone for tennis?" Dolan said, raising a laugh.

Mooney paused in the doorway to the front porch. "I don't know about the rest of you, but Australians are good swimmers. I can see the mainland from the pier, and anything I can see I can reach."

Carsfield stood up. As Mooney opened the door, the director shouted in a voice that rattled the windows, "Major!"

Mooney looked back.

"You cannot leave the island. I won't permit it."

"Get stuffed, Julian. I'm sending back the police—and one psychiatrist."

Mooney swung open the door. Carsfield raised the gun, aimed carefully, and fired. The noise was deafening in the enclosed space. Mooney cried out and fell to the floor.

This ended rehearsals for the time being and established two things: Carsfield would not hesitate to use the gun on anyone attempting to flee, and his aim was good—the bullet had passed through the calf of Mooney's leg.

Later that day, with the wounded man bandaged and in bed, the others sat in the kitchen, which had become their unofficial meeting place. "We have to do something," Echo said, "before he kills us all."

"He *avoided* killing Mooney," Meredith pointed out.

"If we started a fire," Dolan suggested, "they'd see it from the mainland and send a boat across to put it out."

"Arriving in time to hose down the ashes of my property. Thank you very much."

The group went to bed for the second night in captivity feeling relatively stable. It was true that Julian had carefully inflicted only a flesh wound on Mooney. That was sane behavior. If they went along with him for a few more days, they would probably come away unharmed with stories they could dine out on for years. The publicity might even boost their audiences. In the meantime, there was no real emergency, no cause for alarm.

The situation changed in the morning. Danny Dolan and his wife were not among those present in the rehearsal room. Carsfield was about to send Echo to roust them out when Dolan came in at a run.

"No more fun and games, Julian," he said. "Betty had contractions this morning."

"Is she in bed?"

"And there she stays. I'm not taking any chances with her welfare or the baby's."

"Quite right. We'll do scenes she doesn't appear in."

"Damn it, I want her off the island and within reach of a hospital. If it starts again she could miscarry."

"We both know that isn't liable to happen."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You're trying it on. The two of you made this up so I'd let you go."

"You arrogant—" Dolan moved toward the table but stopped when the gun came up quickly.

"Don't force my hand," Carsfield said. "Meredith, go up and have a word with her. See how she is."

When Meredith returned, she looked sober. "It's no hoax, Julian. I've seen enough women in labor at the hospital where I do my volunteer work. She ought to be taken home."

"Is she experiencing anything now?"

"Not at the moment, but—"

"Then we're all right. Act Two, please. Take it from Uncle Ben's entrance. Echo, will you read in the part of the expectant mother?"

Dolan was outraged. "You mean we're going on as if—"

"That's why we're here. This is my production, Danny. I made it, and I mean to see it through to the end."

Dolan's idea occurred to him over lunch. He outlined it to the others. "It might work," he said, "especially since Carsfield is determined to let nothing stop rehearsals."

"I'm not sure I could do it," Meredith said.

"You'll only have to wound him," Dolan said. "He wounded Mooney. Anyway, hospital is the best place for him. He'll get treatment—an enforced rest."

"I suppose you're right."

"I know I'm right." Dolan turned to Echo. "Nip on stage and get rid of the prop gun I use at the end of the play. Hide it somewhere."

She hurried away and the cast went on eating lunch in silence. At last Meredith said, "You're asking a lot of me."

"You saw Betty," Dolan reminded her. "We have to get her home."

The afternoon rehearsal went well. Carsfield checked his stopwatch from time to time. "Great pacing," he called to them. "For the first time it feels right."

"Julian," Dolan said from the stage, "can we do the end of the play? It's never gone properly for me."

"Yes, the confrontation between you and Meredith. Fine. Places, everybody."

There was tension in the air as the players ran through the final scene leading up to the climax. When that point arrived, Dolan and Meredith were in the heat of an argument. Her affair with the Major had been uncovered. Dolan cursed her out, then, his jealousy fueled by several drinks, he stumbled to the desk, opened a drawer, and—stopped.

"Come on," he said, dropping out of character, "the gun isn't here."

"Props!" Carsfield bellowed.

"I haven't seen it!" Echo wailed from the wings.

"Carry on," Carsfield droned.

"What am I supposed to do? Point my finger and say bang?"

"Don't lose the momentum!" The director's voice was rising.

"I aim at Meredith, we struggle, she manages to turn the gun on me, it goes off, and I fall down dead." Dolan wheeled away. "I can't do all that without a gun."

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the climax of the play." Carsfield was on his feet. He sounded pedantic, the schoolmaster on an afternoon when the class is troublesome. "The rehearsal has been going well. Let's not lose it."

Meredith said tentatively, "Julian—if you don't mind, you've got a gun."

"That's an idea," Dolan said in an offhand way.

"I'm sure you'd like to get your hands on this gun."

"You can take the bullets out of it."

For the first time on the island, Carsfield laughed. "You must think I'm mad. Without bullets in the gun I'd have no control over you."

Dolan pretended to think. Then he said, "The problem for me is the moves in the struggle with Meredith. You keep the gun, but do my part. Show me how it's supposed to go."

They all stood frozen, watching Carsfield, wondering which way the coin would drop. At last he made up his mind. "Very well. Come down here, everybody except Meredith. I'll go up there." He did. "We'll do the confrontation. And pay attention, Danny. This is the way it's meant to end."

Carsfield took his place at the desk. Meredith stood by the settee. Echo held her script ready to prompt, but it was unnecessary—the director knew the lines. There was a brief stage wait and then Carsfield turned with the gun in his hand.

"There's only one way to deal with you and the Major," he said. "I see that now."

"Don't be a fool." Meredith approached him. "You'd never get away with it."

"I don't care any more."

"Don't you?" She was close enough to grapple with him. She did, seizing the gun hand.

"This is the way it goes," Carsfield called to Dolan. "It's like choreography. My arm around her shoulder, hers around my waist. Her hand on the gun. The hands move so that the gun is concealed between us. Nobody knows who has it."

The figures on stage were locked together. There was silence from the room until Dolan called, "Shoot, Meredith! Shoot him!"

Their faces were inches apart. Only on those occasions in the car when they said goodnight had they been this close. His pressure on the gun

was firm, but now Meredith felt herself gaining control. She was supposed to wound him—but how? There was no time and with the weapon where it was no way she could take aim.

Their eyes met and she realized that he understood everything. He was smiling at her and his eyelids lowered gently and rose again in that familiar sign of acquiescence. The gun went off and instantly he became a dead weight in her arms. As the others ran toward them, she lowered Julian onto the settee.

The launch was halfway between the island and the mainland. Nobody had said anything for ten minutes. They were not looking at each other. Griffith Mooney had brought a bottle of wine with him and was drinking from it, his bandaged leg propped on a seat. He turned now to look back at Julian Carsfield's body, wrapped in a blanket.

"Tell you what I'd like to do," he slurred. "I'd like to bury the bastard at sea."

There was no response until Meredith spoke almost a minute later. "Maybe you'll understand when and if you sober up," she said. "He loved us a lot more than we loved him."

Carsfield's legacy troubled Meredith more than anything that had happened while he was still alive. The letter to the police was found in his jacket pocket when he was being processed at the morgue. It explained in concise, academic language that he had been kidnapped by the players. Their motive, he said, was personal acrimony; they intended to sabotage his current production and did not want him around to oppose them.

He had tried once to escape. There was a struggle and one of the actors was shot in the leg. Anything might happen next time. He even anticipated the question of the villager who saw him boarding the launch in good spirits. At that time there was no indication he was to be held prisoner.

At the hearing, the combined stories of the cast outweighed Carsfield's accusation. The case against them could not be proven and was dismissed. But notoriety hung in the air like the acrid stench that follows a pistol shot. The dramatic society could not live it down; they disbanded soon after.

Griffith Mooney began accepting parts with a rival group. Meredith went to see one of the productions and had a drink with the Australian afterward. They talked about Carsfield.

"He had his way in the end," she said. "He stopped us from stealing any more plays."

"Still think he loved us?"

"You should know, Griffith, that it's possible to love and hate at the same time."

As they left the bar, Meredith said, "Your limp looks artistic on stage. Is the leg troubling you much?"

"No, it's completely healed. The limp is a cheat for dramatic purposes," Mooney said. "If life plays a trick on you, turn it to your advantage." He gave her a wink. "I learned that from Carsfield."

SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

MOVING? We need 6 weeks' notice. Please attach your label to the space below and write in your new address.

QUESTION OR PROBLEM? It can be handled faster if we have your label.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE: From time to time the AHMM mailing list is made available to companies that want to send promotional material offering their products. To do this they must have our approval of the mailing piece itself and of what they are selling. If you prefer not to receive these mailings, please tell us and we will remove your name. Write to the address below.

EXPIRATION DATE: In the upper right hand corner of your mailing label you'll find the date of your last issue—e.g., JAN 80 means your subscription expires with the January 1980 issue.

New
address?
Put it
below
MAIL TO:

Please attach here your AHMM
label from the cover of your
most recent issue.

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK'S
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE
Box 1932
MARION
OH 43305

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The purple owl contained Partlow's retirement fund . . .

PARTLOW'S OWL

by
**GARY
ALEXANDER**



Cowpoke Ed Castleberry's nickname was the natural result of his attire: pointed boots, Western shirts with mother-of-pearl buttons, and a ten-gallon hat that Partlow required him to remove before he would serve him in the cocktail lounge of the Pastime Cafe.

Castleberry's nondescript twang had been acquired somewhere west of Bridgeport, Connecticut. The closest he'd ever been to a steer was on Friday nights when he cashed his paycheck from Pridemore Drywall and

tore into a twelve-ounce top sirloin while saddled up to a stool at Partlow's bar.

Ronnie Skaggs, a sheet-rock taper who drifted into town and Pride-more's payroll on Wednesday, sat beside Castleberry, munching deeply into a double cheeseburger.

Castleberry peeled back the foil on his baked potato and said, "Suppose you heard the rumor."

"Mmph." Skaggs had been staring vacantly at the TV above the cash register. A couple of middleweights were sniffing each other out like reluctant tomcats. "Anything to it?"

Castleberry dabbed his lips with a napkin. Like Skaggs, he was a short man in his mid-twenties with no excess flesh. "Lemme tell you a story," he said. "I got it from a reliable source. These condos we're working on are going sour. The general ain't paying his subs—and that includes Alex Pridemore. The attorney general, downtown, wants to talk it over with the general, but the general missed his appointment with him, I hear, because he's in Brazil or someplace. That's how it stands. Touch and go."

Just then, Skaggs was distracted by a flicker of reflected light from the television. "What the hell is *that*?"

"What's what? Oh, you mean Partlow's owl. Big dude, ain't it?"

Skaggs squinted at the ceramic owl perched on the back bar. It was taller than the Galliano bottle next to it and ten times as fat: all shiny purple glaze except for the yellow eyes, the wide slot on its brow, and the big rhinestone jewel in the vicinity of its belly button—if owls have belly buttons.

"Ugliest thing I ever saw," Skaggs said. "When the light from the screen blinks off it, it looks like it's got a toe stuck in an electric socket."

"I'll bet it's the richest piggy bank in town too. Maybe that's why Partlow recently stuck on that idiot jewel," Castleberry said. "He picked it up ten years ago, I hear, from some import shop. It's the old-fashioned kind you have to bust open to clean out. There's no coins in it either—just greenbacks, ten years of prime tips. Lemme tell you a story. No, hell, I'll let Partlow tell it. He does it better. Hey, Partlow, two more!"

Partlow, a huge shambling man on the backside of fifty, brought the drinks. Cutty rocks and a cherry for Castleberry, rum and ginger ale for Ronnie Skaggs.

"Tell my sidekick about your owl," Castleberry urged. "You do it better than me."

Partlow scanned the lounge area first. Slow night for a Friday, but it was still early. A few stragglers from lunch who didn't quite make it back to work. The gang from Ellison Electronics, with two tables pulled together, enjoying their weekly pasta and beer.

Partlow began. "It's my retirement fund. The union, they rob you blind for years. Their pension, along with Social Security, will maybe pay the gas bill. I was in the Pacific during the War and had a liberty in Sydney you wouldn't believe. Always wanted to go back, so I am. Next year me and the missus are going to pack it in. The sale of our house will give us a nest egg and—" he cocked his head affectionately toward the purple owl "—Maisie here will buy us passage, with enough left over for mad money. We'll get us a little place in town with maybe a view of the waterfront and that opera house they have there."

Skaggs hoisted his glass. "The best of luck."

After Partlow had lumbered off, Skaggs asked, "Cowpoke, how much you figure is in that thing?"

Castleberry whistled softly. "Lemme tell you a story. The other night this guy comes in. He's got the territory for some outfit that sells conveyer belts to factories. A real stiff. He drops by about once a month and gets as drunk as seven hundred dollars' worth of loose change on the bar. Anyway, last year he lurched out one night, climbed into that Lincoln he drives, and got it into reverse by mistake. Before he knows what's happening he's up on the sidewalk, squashing a *Tribune* newspaper box into a telephone pole. These two cops who coop behind the fabric store next door wake up from all the racket, and in five seconds flat they have the salesman spread-eagled on a fender giving him his rights. This one cop is writing in his ticket book and I swear he's getting writer's cramp.

"Well, Partlow comes out and talks to the law for a minute and everything's O.K. with the world again. They stop writing and call a cab for the salesman." He rotated his glass on the bar. "I've seen those cops in here on their day off. Never any of their money on the bar, though, and that didn't hurt a bit when Partlow asked for a favor. So whenever the salesman passes by and takes on a load, he remembers that little problem Partlow worked out for him. Like the other night, he leaves two tens and a five. I swear, Ronnie, that owl is so stuffed by now, Partlow has to jam the bills down the slot with a coat hanger. That's how much he's got in that purple owl."

Skaggs whistled. "Thousands, probably. It don't seem very safe here."

The Cowpoke didn't answer. Hearing a loud, happy roar behind them, he and Skaggs swiveled around in time to see a pyramid of empty beer cans collapse on one of the Ellison Electronics tables, a metallic avalanche that carried glasses and ashtrays to the floor with it. Six or eight guys their age, with narrow ties and thick glasses, were laughing and slapping their knees.

Partlow shuffled by, swung up the bar-end on its hinges, and headed out to help clean up. He shook his head and smiled. "Those Ellison kids are real pistols. You wait—they're going to tell me they were working out a new scientific experiment by stacking those cans. You wait."

"Boy wonders," Castleberry whispered to Skaggs. "Geniuses. They're like the sons Partlow and his old lady never had. Partlow is very big on education. Don't ever let him corner you on the subject. He'll hog-tie you for hours with one of his lectures."

"What do they do?"

"They're engineers," Castleberry said. "Ellison makes calculators, video games, and some hush-hush stuff, like them Watergate clowns had. Partlow thinks they're the greatest thing since sliced bread because they've got sheepskins. They're hot tickets with him. You think you and me could get away with making that mess? No way. We're just working stiffs. He'd eighty-six us without batting an eye. They do what they want in here, but when all the Cowpoke wants to do is sip a little Cutty with his Stetson on his head, you think I'd get a break? Not a chance. 'We got a dress code, Cowpoke,' he told me. 'I serve you with that thing on your head, pretty soon we get the hippies. No shoes, no service.'"

"Same with a lady in a skirt who wants to sit at the bar. Partlow says he'd better see more cloth than leg. 'Same with you, Cowpoke. I got standards and I don't make no exceptions. I run a nice bar.' Partlow can be a real pain."

"Yeah. But, as I was saying, this isn't the safest place to stash so much bread."

Castleberry laughed. "Lemme tell you a story. The Pastime has an alarm system, for openers. And as far as carting the owl out the door when Partlow is on duty, I got this from a reliable source—

"A Saturday afternoon in July and Partlow has the duty. Leamy, who has days and weekends, called in sick with another outburst of the flu—and if you ever met Leamy you know what I'm talking about. So Partlow is there polishing glasses with five customers, tops.

"This one guy's been at the bar for two or three hours. He's a biker and he's damn near Partlow's size, except he's two or three centuries younger. He's wearing this leather vest and he has tattoos on his arms that would take as long to study as if you went to an art gallery. A real mean type. You wouldn't die of shock if you heard he kidnapped the Easter Seal girl.

"Partlow has to go to the john for a minute, and as soon as he's around the corner this maniac hops the bar and grabs the purple owl. Everyone else in the lounge is this little group from the nursing home right off the highway behind the Burger King. They're all support hose and bad arteries. The biker looks at them one time and he doesn't have to say a word. You can hear a pin drop. He's to the side door when Partlow comes back in. Partlow sees this wise guy.

"Partlow gets real polite when he's mad. Gives you the creeps. He says something like, 'I'd appreciate it if you'd put Maisie back where you found her.' The biker says something like 'Get outta my life.' Partlow just calmly strolls on over and lands a haymaker in the biker's face. The jerk folds up like a cheap accordion and Partlow grabs his owl before it hits the deck, then helps this num-num out the door, and, from what I hear, he doesn't bother to open it first."

Skaggs had been listening but he was also studying Partlow as he methodically sliced fruit.

A geezer, Skaggs thought, but still a bull. He could've hunted bear with a switchblade in his day.

"They got a night janitor here?" he asked Castleberry.

"You still thinking about that owl? Forget it. No chance."

"Do they?"

"No. A kid comes in the morning before school. Let's change the subject."

"Let's not. If the job goes down the tubes, we're in for a long vacation—which is O.K. if you've got the bread to enjoy it with."

"C'mon."

"How many payments you got left on your pickup, Cowpoke?"

Castleberry visualized his Dodge half-ton with its mag wheels, candy-apple paint, gun rack, and the bucking-bronc hood ornament he'd bought through mail-order.

"Eleven," he said slowly. "The mouse house what carries the contract will poach it if I'm five minutes late with a payment."

Skaggs nodded. "So we'll just solve that little problem."

Castleberry said nothing.

"What's the matter, Cowpoke? Partlow your daddy?"

Castleberry glanced through the mirror. Partlow stood by the Ellison punks, chewing the fat.

"Not hardly—but there's that alarm."

Skaggs nudged him, then reached into his pockets. He pulled out a pair of needle-nose pliers, a lockpick, and some wire with clips attached. After the Cowpoke had a look, Skaggs stuffed it back into his jeans.

"I keep it with me just in case something comes up. Like now. I haven't been taping and texturing drywall all my life, you know."

Castleberry took a thoughtful sip of Cutty rocks and said, "Always did want to round me up enough of a stake to buy a little spread someday."

Not only was it uncomfortable, it was sissy-like. Castleberry imagined himself riding sidesaddle.

"How long we gotta do this?" he complained.

Skaggs knelt on the stool in the booth next to Castleberry. They'd been the last customers out of the bar, but instead of going out the exit they'd taken a quick left at the men's room.

Skaggs stepped down. "It's been dark and quiet out there for twenty minutes. Reckon all's clear."

They limped into the office where Castleberry said the alarm box was located. The Cowpoke held a flashlight while Skaggs picked, clipped, and snipped.

"You do this often?" Castleberry asked.

"Let's go get that owl."

Castleberry's pickup was in the transit park-and-ride lot behind the discount mart. A sprinkling of vehicles at 3:00 A.M. wasn't out of the ordinary.

They staggered under the load, but managed to get the owl inside the truck, its head propped against the gun rack and a Winchester .30-06 that had a broken firing pin.

Castleberry started the truck up and took the time to roll a cigarette. "I think I'll get me about fifty acres east of the mountains, some Black Angus, and—"

"Just get us the hell out of here," Skaggs snapped.

Castleberry drove out of town in the direction of the foothills. "Some

small lakes up there and side roads every which way," he said. "We'll find one and crack this thing open like an egg. Yippie-ki-yea!"

A rutted trail ran about a hundred yards off the highway. Castleberry stopped at the very end. They got out and hoisted the owl into the truck's bed, preparing to drop it out on the ground. But just as they began to lift it they saw the glow of headlights approaching and froze like mesmerized jackrabbits. "Cops?" Castleberry asked.

The car was now in view. "Nah," Skaggs said. "No gumball machine on top."

"Good," Castleberry said, finally exhaling. "Must be kids. This is lovers' lane territory. They come up here to swap spit. We'll chase 'em out and get on with our business."

The car stopped and Partlow emerged. In one hand he held the longest axe handle either of the sheet-rock installers had ever seen. In the other was cradled a tiny gizmo that made a beeping sound.

"Good evening," he said politely. "I trust Maisie is in good health." Silence.

"Don't have a story, Cowpoke? Well, lemme tell *you* a story. Those kids at Ellison are hot tickets, you know, and this little gadget they gave me worked just like a charm. See, that jewel in Maisie's belly button, which she doesn't have, isn't exactly a jewel—it's a transmitter, and when you so much as give her a pat on the fanny it sets off this buzzer. Then all you have to do is look at this meter and, as long as the needle is centered, it means you're headed right for Maisie.

"Great kids, they are. They got to worrying about old Partlow and all that money inside Maisie. I guess they had me pegged as some old coot who acts like next week F.D.R. is going to call a bank holiday. So they talked me into sticking the jewel on her. The receiver—this thing—I always have with me, like those salesmen we get in the bar and their bellboys."

Castleberry started for the passenger door of his pickup, thinking that once he got his spread he'd get the firing pin on the Winchester fixed. He'd need it over there for the coyotes. In the meantime, he'd grab it and bring it around like Reggie Jackson, Partlow's head being the strike zone.

Partlow, moving too damn fast to be believed, cut off the Cowpoke's angle. He patted the axe handle in his other hand. "Cowpoke, let's not be silly. You go ahead and back up a mite."

Castleberry did, joining Skaggs at the edge of the brush, which might or might not have been poison oak. Partlow then swung the axe handle and clobbered Castleberry's mail-order hood ornament, breaking off the bucking bronc at its knees.

"Don't make pot metal like they used to," Partlow said thoughtfully. "Good white ash, this handle is. Got hickory beat all to hell, I think. How do you feel about that, Cowpoke?"

Castleberry didn't feel anything.

"Well, Maisie's going to catch a chill if I don't get her home. You boys do the honors, if you would—right in the back seat on the blanket."

"You planning to turn us in?" Castleberry asked hoarsely.

Partlow laughed. "Why would you think that, Cowpoke? We just had a minor misunderstanding. You were merely taking Maisie out for some air, knowing that the bar gets mighty smoky and that she'd appreciate it. It's the dickens to keep her clean with all the crud that crusts up on her. Of course, with all this fresh air, she's probably worked up a fierce appetite. She wouldn't take offense if you fed her."

Castleberry and Skaggs quickdrew their wallets.

"Good," Partlow said approvingly as he watched them poke bills down Maisie's slot. "But lemme tell you another story. My missus just discovered she has a relative in New Zealand, a third cousin or something. She got that from her genealogy studies, which she's all wrapped up in now since her arthritis got so bad she can't do needlepoint any longer. So she writes these people and they say they'd love to see us when we get Down Under, and they make this specific invitation to spend our first Christmas there with them. We write back and say O.K., although I'm not one hundred percent in favor because of the world being upside down there, and it's sure to be hot as the blazes. Plus, Auckland is a good thousand miles from Sydney, and you can't go on the cheap by taking the bus. That's an item we didn't have in our budget so I'm afraid Maisie'll have to take on some more weight, poor gal. You boys get in three, four nights a week and I'll tell Maisie not to worry."

Skaggs had just deposited his last twenty in the owl's slot. "How long's Maisie going to stay hungry?"

Partlow tapped the axe handle rhythmically on his palm. "Hard to say. But on off nights when the TV and jukebox are off I wouldn't be surprised if you could hear her stomach growl."

Jackie Harmony was getting a little too old for the burglary game . . .

RETIREMENT JOB



by

MICHAEL SCOTT CAIN

Jackie Harmony loaded the last TV set into his VW camper and smiled with satisfaction. Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he slammed the back door shut, recoiling from the echo the noise made in the dark alley. He shot a quick glance in each direction. When he was sure no one was around, he locked the back door and walked around to the driver's side, rubbing his hands together, half in satisfaction, half to warm them. As he opened the door, Charlie Weed stepped out of a doorway.

"Evening, Jackie," he said.

Harmony turned to run but three uniformed cops blocked his way. He shrugged and leaned against the side of the camper.

"Twenty color-TV sets, Jackie?" Weed kept his hands in his pockets, playing it casual; Harmony felt hate well up in him. "Isn't that kind of greedy?"

"I like to watch Johnny Carson."

Weed smiled, but there was no humor in it. His face was smug with self-satisfaction. Jackie wished he was still young enough to hit him and make a break for it, but he was too old for grandstanding. Judging from how easily they'd caught him tonight, he was too old for all of this.

"We'll talk about great moments from the *Tonight* show down at the station, Jackie." Nodding to his men, Weed said, "Bring him in."

Weed didn't offer Harmony any coffee. He sat behind his desk, making a big production out of getting his own coffee creamed and sugared to perfection. Though he didn't speak to Harmony, he glanced at him occasionally, smirking slightly.

Weed made a big production out of everything, Harmony thought. He was so cool, so remote and unfeeling, that just being around him was enough to make you nervous. Right now Harmony wanted a cup of coffee more than he'd ever wanted anything, but he'd be damned if he'd ask Weed for one.

He'd known Weed since the detective first hit the streets about fifteen years ago, but Weed hadn't aged. He still looked like a hick farm kid dressed up in city clothes. His hair was a little thinner, that was all.

Jackie Harmony was very aware of age since he'd heard about an old school buddy of his dropping dead of natural causes. He wasn't young any more. It amazed him; he'd been young all his life and suddenly overnight he was old. That worried him right now. He'd been up all night and his eyes burned with fatigue. Coffee would help, but no way would he ask Weed for some. He wouldn't ask Weed for anything.

"Harmony. Jackie Harmony." Weed seemed to be thinking out loud. "Funny, we got Jackie Carmichael as a name. Which is real?"

"Harmony's my professional name."

"Oh?"

What was Weed doing? He knew all about Jackie. Weed knew all about everybody. Why was he doing this?

"I used to sing. Jackie Harmony was my stage name."

"You should've stuck to it. You sure haven't got it as a burglar."

"I had it as a singer, but I didn't have the connections. And you know how it is, Weed—I could never resist a fast buck."

"After the two falls you took I'd've figured you for retirement. That's what I was hearing anyway."

"I tried it. But, man, you hear about a warehouse full of color TVs and it's hard to stay retired."

"Well, Jackie, you should have fought off the temptation. You're looking at twenty years here."

"Come off it, Weed. Who you think you're dealing with? I'll pull three if I can't plea-bargain my way out. I'll be back on the street in eighteen months."

"I doubt that, Jackie."

"Tell you what. Why don't we just call my lawyer right now and see how much time I'm going to pull for one crummy job?"

Weed finished off his coffee and poured himself another cup. Harmony's mouth was dry. He watched the steam rise from the cup.

"When you make that call," Weed said, "tell your lawyer I got sixty-five open burglaries on the books and you're good for about thirty of them."

"What are you trying to pull, Weed?"

"I just cracked me a burglary ring—a one-man ring. How do you like that, Jackie? I got MO, I got evidence we found in your apartment, I got eyewitnesses if I need them. You're doing twenty years minimum. You'll be close to eighty before you see the street again."

"You can't do this, Weed."

"What's to stop me?"

Harmony slumped in his chair. The office was cold and he felt it all the way to his core. "Can I have some of that coffee?"

Weed smiled. "I thought you'd never ask."

When he was halfway through his coffee, Harmony asked, "What do you want, Weed?"

"Don Copeland."

"You're crazy."

"He's become a nuisance."

"A nuisance? The man would as soon blow you away as look at you and you call him a nuisance?"

"I admit he's a little unstable." Weed folded his hands across his belly and leaned back, smiling at Jackie, who felt somehow bewildered. Weed seemed to find his bewilderment amusing. "But the thing is he's getting big-headed now. He acts like he and his brothers are some kind of three-man Mafia."

Weed always talked like some kind of sissy professor, but his eyes glinted as though he was being funny and Harmony wasn't bright enough to get the joke. It threw Jackie off balance. When he was with Weed he was never quite sure what was going down.

"Thing is, Jackie," Weed continued, "I'm ready to take them out. I won't tolerate gun-running in my streets."

Jackie shuddered and quickly drank off the rest of his coffee. Weed refilled his cup. "And, Jackie, I'm going to let you help me."

"He'll kill me."

"He'll be in jail."

"His brothers will get me."

"Nope. They're going to jail too."

"But what if you miss?"

"Breaks of the game, Jackie. Nobody said life didn't have an element of risk to it."

"I won't do it."

Weed leaned forward again, spreading his hands flat on the desk. "Jackie." He spoke as though explaining something to a small, slightly stupid child. "You got two choices. You can help me put Copeland away or you can take the fall for a couple of dozen jobs."

Jackie's head pounded with pain. It was midmorning now but he still hadn't slept. There was no time to sleep. He slapped a couple of shirts, some pants, and underwear into his suitcase and slammed it shut. If he stayed around he was a dead man either way. If Copeland and his crazy brothers didn't get him, Weed would put him away for twenty years. Weed was a lot of things but a liar wasn't one of them. If he said you were going up, you'd better look forward to twenty years without Christmas trees. And Jackie was too old and tired to consider a fall.

He went out the back way and sneaked up the alley for six blocks. Then he grabbed a cab to the bus station. As he ran toward the depot to grab a northbound bus, Weed stepped out to greet him.

"Jaekie," he said, "you are a constant disappointment to me."

He finally slept when he got back to his room, but an ache in his shoulder woke him at nine-thirty that night. He tried to shower the pain away but it didn't help. Moving his arm to get a shirt on was agony, so although it was turning cold outside he figured he'd do without a coat. Having to go running the streets at night was ridiculous and he felt the resentment rise in him. At his age he should be spending his evenings sipping beer and watching TV, not running around the neighborhood looking for a crazy man like Don Copeland.

He found the Copeland brothers in Marty's bar. They sat in a booth, talking quietly and sipping whiskey.

"Mr. Copeland?" he said tentatively.

Don Copeland didn't look up. "Who's that?"

His brother Ted looked exactly like him. Except for Don's glasses, you couldn't tell them apart. They both had fashionable razor cuts and thin dark moustaches.

"It's that creep Harmony," Ted said. "You know—the singing burglar."

"I hate a small-time sneak thief," Don said. "Get him out of here."

"But, Mr. Copeland, this is important."

"Tommy?"

The third brother was fat. A button was missing on the vest of his three-piece suit and the others were straining. "Yeah, Don?"

"Ask the creep to leave. If he needs help, help him."

Tommy Copeland smiled as he grabbed Jackie's arm. The pain shot through Jackie's bad shoulder and he fell to his knees.

"Please," he wailed.

Tommy Copeland shoved him into a table. Jackie fell, hitting his elbow. He yelled and fought back tears. A man his age didn't cry, no matter how much it hurt.

Weed was waiting for him outside. "Ready to do it my way?"

Jackie rubbed his sore shoulder.

Tommy Copeland answered the phone.

"Hello?"

"Tommy? It's me, Jackie Harmony."

"Oh, yeah, come on over. Let me beat up on you a little."

"Look, Tommy, this is important."

"Not if you got anything to do with it."

Hang up, he thought. Hang up before you commit suicide. "Tommy, I got something your brother's going to be interested in," he said quickly. "I mean it, this is big. Too big for me."

"A telephone booth's too big for you, creep."

"Your brother's going to want to know about this, Tommy. It's important and I need help with it."

"What have you got?"

"Can I talk to Don?"

"You're lucky to be talking to me. Now tell me what you got."

Jackie took a deep breath. His hands were shaking. "Six cases of brand new handguns. Three-fifty-seven Magnums."

Tommy whistled. "Where'd you get them?"

"I hit a warehouse outside of Philly. I thought they were TVs. They're in TV crates."

"Sit tight. We'll get back to you."

"O.K. The number here's—"

"I know the number," Tommy interrupted. "I know everybody's number." He hung up. Jackie held the phone a moment and sighed.

"Good work," Weed said. "O.K., we'll get the camper ready."

"What are you going to do to it?"

"Wire it. We'll be taping every word that's said. And we'll put a beeper under the bumper. Stay cool, Jackie. We'll be with you all the way."

Jackie let Weed out and walked back to the refrigerator. Pouring some orange juice into a glass, he added a large shot of vodka. It tasted fine. Weed was right. He should've retired. As he poured himself another drink, he decided that, if he made it through this alive, he'd really retire—never do another job.

He was on his fourth drink when the phone rang again.

"We meet at midnight, creep," Tommy Copeland said. "At Marty's place."

"Are you kidding? I can't bring those guns in there."

"Don't be stupid. We meet there and go see the stuff."

"Oh, of course."

"Don't be late," Tommy said as he hung up.

At eight-thirty Jackie was trying to watch a rerun of *The Rockford Files* when a knock came at the door. When he opened it, Tommy Copeland shoved a gun into his face.

"Back up, creep."

He raised his hands and backed away. The Copeland brothers walked in. Don kept his hands in his pockets and screwed his face up as though the smell of the apartment offended him.

"I'm very disappointed in you, Harmony," Don said.

"What? What do you mean?"

Don shook his head slowly. "Didn't we all grow up in the same neighborhood? Ain't we all hometown boys?"

"Well, sure."

"And you try to sell me out to Weed like this! You ought to know better than that, Harmony."

Jackie's muscles wouldn't support him. "Oh, crud," he said, "you got a guy on the force."

Don turned to Tommy. "I thought you said he was stupid. He ain't stupid at all. See how fast he put that together?"

"If he'd put it together before he made a deal with Weed, he wouldn't be in this fix right now."

"I didn't say he was quick. Just that he wasn't stupid."

"Don," Jackie said, "I didn't want to do it. Weed was going to send me up for twenty years. He had me cold. I didn't want to do it, but I didn't have any choice. I don't want any of this stuff any more. It was like a retirement job to me, you know? I'm giving it up."

"A retirement job, huh?"

"Yeah. I'm getting out of the business. I won't be a bother to you ever again."

"Jackie?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to give you a retirement party you'll never forget."

"Please, Don!"

"Just as soon as we get those guns you're going to have a retirement party you'll never forget."

"But it's a setup—you know that."

"I also know Weed baited it with six cases of guns. We're going to get those anyway. And you and your van are going to disappear. It'll look like you tried to run out and had a wreck. A very bad wreck."

"Weed'll know what happened."

"Sure—he's not stupid either. But what's he going to do? What do you think, Jackie? You want a big bunch of fireworks at your retirement party?"

"Look, Don—"

"Where's the van now?"

"In the alley."

"Let's go."

Jackie started to speak, but Tommy smiled and pressed the gun against his temple. As they walked down to the alley entrance, Jackie fought back the impulse to scream. To anyone on the street they looked like four guys on their way to the bar for a few drinks—the sheer ordinariness of the situation chilled him. There should be something special, something unique about a man going to his death. It shouldn't look like just another evening walk.

He tripped in the dark alley. Tommy Copeland grabbed him by his bad shoulder to steady him. Stabs of pain shot through his body.

"Easy, creep," Tommy giggled. "We wouldn't want you to get hurt."

When they reached the van, Don said, "Give Ted the keys."

Jackie handed them over. Ted unlocked the back door and opened it. Neatly stacked TV cartons took up all the space.

Copeland walked him forward. "Squeeze in." He gave orders to his brothers. "Ted, get the beeper. Tommy, find the mike. Let's get out of here before Weed shows up."

"I'm already here, Copeland." Weed stepped out from behind some garbage cans.

Tommy snapped off a shot at Weed, and as Jackie dived for the ground he saw Weed throw himself down and roll. Gunfire erupted from all around as Jackie squeezed himself under the van, banging his bad shoulder on the bumper. He could see feet running, and the gunshots were deafening. A body fell next to him and he found himself looking into the blank eyes of Don Copeland. He yelled.

When he realized the only sound left was his own yelling, he stopped and fought to get himself together. Someone dragged Don Copeland's body away and he slid out from under the van.

Weed directed the cleanup. Turning to Jackie, he said, "It's all over. We got them."

"You knew he'd come early."

"I figured he'd know we were setting him up. But he's greedy. I knew he'd want those guns."

"He's got a man in the precinct."

"We'll get him. Tommy'll be more than glad to name him—won't you, Tommy?"

Jackie's muscles weakened and he leaned against the van for support. He'd assumed Tommy had been shot too. Looking over at a squad car, he saw the man in the back seat.

"You're a dead man, Harmony!" Tommy called. "You won't live an hour."

"He means it, Weed. You got me killed."

"What are you talking about? It's over. Two of them are dead and Tommy's going to take a fall. It's over."

"You got my brothers killed, creep! You'll die for that!" Tommy rattled the locked door.

"Shut up, Copeland!" Weed yelled. Grabbing a uniformed cop's arm, he said, "Get him out of here."

"Don't you care, Harmony? Don't it make any difference to you that you're as good as dead?" As the squad car pulled out, Tommy Copeland screamed, "As soon as I reach a phone, you're a dead man!"

"Weed—" Jackie began...

"You can leave town," Weed suggested.

Jackie's shoulder hurt so much that the left side of his body was stiff and rigid. He rubbed it and watched the driver slam the ambulance door shut and start the engine. The red lights cast weird reflections in Weed's face as the ambulance pulled out.

"You don't even care, do you?" Jackie said bitterly. "You got what you wanted and it doesn't make a damn bit of difference that you got me killed doing it."

"I'm tired, Jackie," Weed said. "Leave me alone."

A uniformed cop came up to Weed and said, "We're pulling out now."

"Good. Let's go. See you later, Jackie."

"It don't mean a thing to you, does it, Weed?"

The detective climbed into the car and slammed the door. Looking out the window at Harmony he said, "I'll tell you what, Jackie. If you really feel the street isn't safe for you, you can still take that fall." The car pulled out of the alley.

It was cold now and Jackie Harmony winced as he turned up his coat collar. The movement caused a fresh stab of pain in his shoulder. He felt more alone than he ever had. He also felt very old.

And very sure that he wouldn't get much older.

Cheryl knew all the tricks of seduction . . .

A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION



by
DONALD OLSON

"I'm a coward, darling," Cheryl admitted, "but can you really blame me?"

Reed Turner gave his pretty young wife an apologetic peck on the cheek. "There's a kiss for courage." And then, wishing he could believe what he said, "A year may have made all the difference in the world in how he feels. Going off to college. Being away from home. A lot of it could have been Joyce's fault, you know."

"Oh, Reed, I don't think it's fair to blame his mother. She's never acted like a vindictive ex-wife. I honestly can't see her poisoning Ricky's mind against me."

He had to agree. "But Joyce was the innocent party, and Ricky knows it. Joyce and I were probably wrong in keeping our differences from him. The divorce hit him like a freight train. But now that he's had time to come to terms with the situation . . ."

Cheryl responded with a bleak smile. "I still dread having to pick him up by myself, the drive back from the village with not a word out of him, just stony silence. The same old simmering resentment."

"Honey, you know I'd go myself if I could. But I've got to be here for the tournament committee meeting. You know how important it is."

Limberlost Lodge had started out as a ski resort in the Allegheny Mountains until Reed had bought it with a view to realizing its year-round potential. Now it had a golf course, riding trails, tennis courts, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The lodge itself, a sprawling stone and half-timbered Tudor structure, had been extensively restored and refurbished. The views from its site halfway up the mountain were spectacular. And luring one of the big annual golf tournaments to Limberlost would be of immense publicity value.

Cheryl checked the time as if wishing the dreaded confrontation were still weeks away. Ricky was coming to spend two weeks with them and if events repeated themselves it would seem like a lifetime. The memory of last year's visit foreshadowed endless days of nerve-grinding tension.

"Reed, promise me you'll go easy on him. Don't let him get you stirred up. I couldn't face another two weeks like last year."

He tried to make light of it. "It wasn't all *that* bad."

"It wasn't? Are you forgetting that he tried to kill you? Your own son tried to kill you!"

"That's ridiculous. We both lost our temper, that's all."

"But you're the one who almost drowned. And that frightful scene in the dining room. A dozen people heard him threaten to kill you."

"Honey, he's just a kid. He was going through a very difficult time. Come on—his bus arrives in forty-five minutes and I want you to take your time driving down the mountain."

He kissed her again and walked her to the jeep. But for all his attempts to reassure her, he was just as edgy as she was. He loved Ricky and he loved Cheryl. He could only hope that the very excessiveness of Ricky's

resentment at least proved how much he cared for his father and that that very caring—and time—would heal the breach.

The bus was twenty minutes late and by then Cheryl's nerves were very badly strung out. She knew that everything depended on this visit. When the bus finally pulled in, she fixed a brave smile on her face and started waving even before Ricky came into sight.

Her first impression was that he looked even more formidably young and attractive. He was a truly handsome boy, tall and brown and broad-shouldered, his face leaner yet noticeably more mature. But, oh dear, how solemn he looked!

"Ricky!" she greeted him. "How wonderful to see you again! Good heavens, you're an absolute giant!" She might have kept up a line of nervous chatter had he not shocked her into silence by dropping his bag, throwing his arms around her, and planting a kiss on her cheek. Cold acknowledgment of her presence being the most she had hoped for, she found this even more unsettling.

"Hey, you're a pleasant surprise," he told her. "I expected Dad."

"He wanted to come but he's tied up in an important committee meeting."

With a rueful glance he said, "You deserve a medal."

"I do?"

He faced her squarely. "Look. We might as well get this over with right now. All the way here I've been rehearsing my apologies to both of you. Man, what a spoiled brat you must think I am."

"You had every right to react as you did. There's nothing to apologize for."

With a sigh of relief he stretched and took a hearty breath of the meadow-fresh summer air. Then he loaded his bags in the jeep and jumped in beside her. "You've got to say this for getting away from home for a year—it sure does make a guy think."

"Oh, Ricky, you can't imagine how glad I am to hear you say that. And your father will be ecstatic." Then, after a moment's deliberation, she asked, "How's your mom?"

"Great. She sends her regards."

"That's nice of her."

"She's a nice lady."

Although Cheryl had been Reed's secretary before he sold Turner

Enterprises she had never met his first wife. Joyce had never come to the office.

Cheryl had not exaggerated when she said Reed would be ecstatic. He was. Once he realized Ricky's change of attitude, tears came into his eyes. He couldn't stop hugging his son. Dinner that evening in the richly appointed lodge dining room was a festive celebration, and Ricky kept them both amused with accounts of his freshman-year tribulations. "Pre-med's no snap," he concluded, "but even in high school I was a minor whiz in chemistry and biology. I think I can hack it."

Reed talked about his plans for improvements at Limberlost while Cheryl listened, her eyes moving from father to son, noticing how much alike they were, two big, good-looking men with minds of their own.

Later she checked the dinner receipts and performed a few more of her nightly chores before crossing the thick-carpeted lobby to the long shallow stairs that led to the top-level gym and swimming pool, stopping along the way at the first level of out-branching corridors of guest rooms. When she reached the last room on "A" level she made sure the corridor was clear before tapping softly on the door.

Clay Winslow—ski instructor, tennis pro, and general factotum—grabbed her in his arms the moment she stepped inside the room. He was a lithely built, powerful man with smoldering eyes.

"I thought I'd see you in the dining room," Cheryl said.

"I ate early. Pleasant reunion, I hope not."

She gave him a dismal look. "Wrong. You should have been there. Clay, I couldn't believe it. Ricky's an entirely different boy. He wallowed in apologies for last year. We're all buddies now."

His face darkened. "So where does that leave us?"

Her answering shrug infuriated him.

"You had it all figured out," he said. "The kid had threatened to kill his old man. Everyone heard him. All we had to do was set it up—knock your beloved hubby off and frame the kid. Simple, you said."

"How did I know he'd change? He acted like a psycho last year. You'd know that if you'd been here then. He was one hard case."

"So?"

She plucked thoughtfully at her full lower lip. "We have to stick with our plan. Reed has to die, and Ricky has to be convicted of his murder. It's the only way I can get the money. A murderer can't inherit."

"But who'll believe the kid snuffed him now?"

"Let me work on it. I've got an idea, but you may not like it. I told you how the kid constantly lied to Reed last winter—even told him I'd tried to seduce him. He did everything he could to turn Reed against me. Only it didn't work. But suppose Ricky finds reason to believe I'm as bad as he said I was? Everything Reed refused to believe?"

Winslow sniggered. "Fool that he was."

Cheryl shot him a reproachful glance. "I wasn't any of those things then. I knew when Reed married me he was leaving everything to Ricky. But after my uneventful life I was happy to grab Reed. And quite satisfied with him until you came along."

"You haven't told me your idea."

"Suppose I make a play for Ricky? He's sure to tattle to Reed. But Reed won't believe him this time either. And it'll look as if Ricky's change of heart is just a put-on. It might be all that's needed to stir them up again."

Clay was skeptical. "What if it doesn't work?"

"Then we try something else. But we've got to be extra careful now, love. If anyone suspected you and I were—"

"There's always the cabin," he reminded her, reaching for her again.

"We have to work fast," she said, succumbing to his embrace. "We've only got two weeks."

Fast, but with caution, she knew. She couldn't simply throw herself at Ricky. She had to work on him gradually. Not that she would actually seduce him, of course; she would just convey the message that she was interested. She smiled to herself. It might be fun. Clay would murder her if he could read some of her thoughts. For all her desire to acquire Reed's fortune, Cheryl was a sensual creature to whom Ricky's combination of manly good looks and boyish innocence held a strong, if resistible, appeal. That she could bring the boy to the verge of seduction she had no doubt whatsoever. Her success with his father proved that—and he had had a wife.

Reed himself unwittingly cooperated with her plan, for although he would have preferred to spend every waking hour with Ricky he couldn't neglect his many duties and therefore passed much of the responsibility for entertaining his son to Cheryl. She went riding with him along the mountain trails, played tennis and golf with him, enjoyed the pool with him, at first with a good deal of circumspection in her behavior. Most of

the time when they were alone together she talked lovingly about Reed and the plans they shared for Limberlost. But as the days passed she adopted a subtly flirtatious attitude, employing little smiles and casual touches that needn't necessarily be misconstrued. And her references to her married life projected a faintly plaintive tone of regret.

"Honestly, Ricky, I saw more of your father when I was his secretary than I do now. I really can't blame your mother for feeling neglected. Not that he *neglects* me—I don't mean that. I realize how much work he has to do. But it does get rather lonely at times. Your being here makes such a difference. I wish you could stay all summer."

"I wish I could too," he said. "You've been terrific. I was afraid you'd avoid me like the plague—and I wouldn't have blamed you."

They had paused to give the horses a rest in the dense pine-scented forest, and as she let him help her remount she managed to slip back into his arms. For a moment she clung to him, her breath warm on his neck, then—scolding herself for being clumsy—she tried again. Neither of them spoke as they made their way back along the trail to the lodge.

The following night Cheryl knocked on Ricky's door. For a moment she thought he wasn't going to let her in, but he quickly slipped his jeans on over his shorts and held open the door. "Is something wrong, Cheryl?"

She pretended a demure confusion as she stepped inside, her fingers sketching little nervous gestures along the collar of her revealingly low-cut blouse. "No, nothing's wrong—I was just feeling lonely. Reed's working late again in his office."

He shut the door uncertainly. "You sound a little upset."

With her most beguilingly innocent look, she said quietly, "Last winter. What you told your father about us. It wasn't altogether a lie—in a way. You were only reading my mind."

"Cheryl—"

"Ricky—wasn't there maybe just a tiny bit of wishful thinking in it on your part?"

"What do you mean?"

She looked up at him, frankly enticing now. "You know what I mean."

The conflict apparent on his lean brown face amused Cheryl, but she knew she couldn't let things get out of hand. He took a step toward her and she moved around him, paused, came back, and planted a kiss lightly on his lips. "I just had to know where we stood, that's all. I'd better leave."

Reed might be looking for me. Tomorrow? We could stop at that cabin on the North Trail. Nobody would see us there." Without giving him time to react, she opened the door and slipped away.

Back in her room she had bathed, washed her hair, and was propped up in bed reading a magazine when Reed came in. She yawned, stretched, and asked him about his work.

He told her. "And what have you been doing all evening?" he asked.

"I came up hours ago. Keeping up with that son of yours these past few days has been downright exhausting."

"I'm sorry, darling. You've been an angel. From now on I'm going to spend every minute I can with him."

"Good. He wants so much to make up for last winter. It's really touching."

She lay in bed the following morning, imagining the conversation between father and son at the breakfast table. When she got up she practiced her expression in the mirror, affecting a look of sorrowful disappointment. "Oh, darling," she would moan, "not again! You mean he's been pretending all this time? His attitude really *hasn't* changed?"

And that would be the beginning. She smiled, thinking of all the ways she could aggravate the friction and keep them sniping at each other. She dressed and started downstairs.

Clay intercepted her. "What the hell happened last night?"

"Nothing happened. I just did my little number. Now we have only to wait for the results."

He scowled at her. "They both looked happy as clams at breakfast."

Indeed, when she joined them—as they were just returning from nine holes of golf—neither seemed in any way perturbed. Reed's arm was slung affectionately around his son's shoulder and he gave Cheryl a quick kiss. "You want to come riding with us this afternoon?" he said.

Ricky's eyes seemed to avoid hers, his expression blandly detached. She guessed he hadn't said a word to his father about last night. Pre-med? He behaved as if he were majoring in diplomacy. The plan had obviously backfired.

"Thanks, but I'll pass," she murmured.

Ricky seemed to go out of his way thereafter to prevent being alone with her. Everything they did, they did as a threesome.

The days drifted by and she became desperate.

"O.K., O.K., I was wrong," she admitted, meeting Clay in the cabin near the top of the ski lift. "It was a good idea, but it didn't work."

"So that's it, sweet thing? We keep sneaking around like before? Till maybe you decide I'm not worth the effort?"

"Don't be dumb. We've still got five days."

"To do what?"

She ran her fingers through the thick mat of hair on his chest. "Use *your* imagination for a change. Maybe it was a stupid plan anyway. For all we know, a good lawyer might have got the kid off even if it did work."

But they had to do something. She couldn't face another winter stuck out here in the middle of nowhere. She thought a moment and then said brightly, "Why couldn't they have an accident? The two of them."

"What kind of accident?"

"Oh, Clay, what's the matter with you? *You* think of one."

Once a day Clay Winslow drove the jeep down to the village to pick up the mail. That afternoon it included a letter for Ricky.

"It's from Mom!" Ricky cried, tearing it open. He and Reed were sitting alone on the deck overlooking the valley.

"Everything O.K. at home?" Reed asked him after he'd read the letter.

"Yeah, everything's great. She misses me, says she hopes I'm having a good time. She asks about you."

Reed put his hand on his son's shoulder. "You are, aren't you? Having a good time?"

"Terrific—you know it. You and Cheryl have been super—considering."

"Hey, now, that's all forgotten."

They sat looking out at the view. Ricky said, "Mom would love this place."

"She was here once, you know. I brought her here on one of our anniversaries. I think that's when I first got the idea I'd like to own it."

Ricky watched his father's face. "Sometimes I wonder if you'd sold the business a long time ago, if you'd had more time to spend with Mom and me, maybe we'd all still be together."

A distant look settled on Reed's face. "Who knows, son?"

Ricky chose to discern a note of regret in his father's voice. "But if you had it all to do over again—would you have married Cheryl?"

A trace of irritation sharpened Reed's reply. "How the hell can I answer a question like that? It happened."

Ricky burst out, "I *know*. It's done, and we have to make the best of it—"

"I didn't say that."

"If I could just understand *why* it happened."

Reed shrugged, then pointed toward the right of the lodge where the tow lines of the ski lift crossed the ridge of pines. "You know what it's like up there, don't you, son? You're poised, ready to take off. For an instant or two you're scared, uncertain, wondering if you're going to make a fool of yourself or worse."

"But then you give yourself a push and it's too late to stop or turn back. All you feel is a marvelous sense of exhilaration. That's how it was for me with Cheryl—if it makes any sense to you."

"Did you ever want to stop? Or turn back?"

Reed didn't answer. Giving his son a playful slap on the back, he sprang up and walked into the lodge.

Clay was again waiting in the cabin when Cheryl arrived next day. He seemed in a buoyant mood.

"You said it was important," she said.

"Not as important as this," he said, pulling her against him.

Later, pulling on his shirt, he said, "It'll have to be a last-minute move."

"What?"

"The accident, sweet thing."

Her flushed face beamed at him. "You've thought of something!"

"Something perfect—as long as you do your part."

Her smile faltered. "My part?"

"Relax. All you have to do is make damn sure Reed drives the kid to the village when he leaves. Can you do that?"

"Yes."

"I'll make sure I'm busy so he can't ask me."

"It's all right, Clay, Reed will want to drive him. Why does it matter?"

"Because, sweet thing, they're not going to reach the village. A bit of sabotage to the brakes and they'll never make it around that hairpin curve. They'll end up in the gorge and never know what hit them."

"Are you sure you can do it?"

"A cinch."

She nodded approvingly. "I like it."

"I thought you would."

Suddenly she stiffened. "What was that?"

"What?"

She glanced toward the open window. "I thought I heard something. Look outside."

He came back grinning. "Save your nerves for Saturday. If you heard anything it was a deer."

She was still a bit on edge. "Sometimes I wonder if Reed suspects something."

"How could he? We've always played it safe."

"I don't mean 'suspects' exactly. It's just that he hasn't been himself these last few days."

He stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "Maybe that's your fault, the two of us are more than you can handle?"

"I hate having him touch me any more. I try not to show it, but thank goodness it won't be for much longer."

"Two days, sweet thing, then it'll all be yours. And you'll be all mine." He looked at his watch. "I'd better get back. It's almost mail time." He grinned. "And I promised to do a little errand for Ricky-boy."

"Oh?"

"He asked me to pick up something in the village. A going-away present for you. Isn't that sweet?"

"Going away is the best present he could give me."

Ricky, wearing his backpack, intercepted Clay Winslow as he drove back from the village. "I'm bushed, Clay. Can I hitch a ride with you the rest of the way?"

"Hop in," Clay said. Then, handing Ricky the purchase he'd made, he added, "You're lucky. It was their last box."

Ricky stowed it away in his pack. "Thanks a lot. It's not much of a present, but I remember from last year how she likes these French creams."

Clay chuckled. "The little country chick in the store wanted to know who I was buying candy for. One of these days I'm going to give her what she's asking for."

"Did you tell her?"

"Yeah, I said I was buying it for my best girl."

"Clay, you've got it made up here. All these women—"

Clay winked at him. "It's all part of the job, buddy."

That evening Ricky sought out his father in his pine-paneled office and handed him a slim gift-wrapped package. "You can open it now if you want to," he said.

Reed's face expressed a mixture of surprise and embarrassment when he pulled off the wrappings. "Hey, boy, it's—it's really beautiful. Thanks."

Ricky smiled. "I don't expect you to keep it on your desk, or I'd have had it framed." His long fingers played with his gold neck chain. "I didn't tell Mom I was having a print made for you, but I wanted you to see how really super she looks."

Reed stared thoughtfully at the picture of Ricky and Joyce. "She looks—different. Younger."

"Yeah. I guess she'd really let herself go. But I kept teasing her until she had to do something to shut me up. Her figure's pure dynamite now, and she does her hair differently."

"It's the way she used to wear it," Reed said musingly.

"If I were you I wouldn't let Cheryl see it. She might not understand."

With another embarrassed smile Reed placed the photograph in his bottom desk drawer. "Did you get something for Cheryl? A token of appreciation of some kind?"

"I'll send her something from home," Ricky said. "I'm sorry—I was going to pick up a box of those French creams she likes but Clay beat me to it."

"Clay?" Reed looked puzzled.

"Yeah, he just bought her some."

"How do you know that?"

Ricky regarded him innocently. "He told me." He cracked a broad grin. "Hey, you aren't jealous of old Clay, are you, Dad?"

"Don't be silly."

"I'm only kidding you, Dad. I saw the box in the jeep when he picked me up today and asked him who he was buying candy for. He said Cheryl asked him to pick it up for her."

The day before Ricky was to leave he went to his room after lunch and wrote a couple of postcards to college friends. Not that it made much sense, he knew, but it might be worthwhile afterward to have proof that he *thought* they would reach the post office in the village. He carried the cards downstairs. It was about time for Clay's daily trip down the mountain.

His heartbeat quickened when he saw that the jeep was already gone. Then he heard his name called and when he turned around he saw his father waving to him. Clay was with him.

"You better come with us, Ricky. One of the guests was thrown from her horse on the North Trail. She may have a broken leg."

Ricky looked down at the cards in his hand. "Sure. I was just going to ask Clay to drop these off at the post office."

Clay said, "You're too late. Mrs. Turner's making the mail run. She's already gone. Sorry."

Ricky stood looking back down the mountain, then turned to follow the two men, stuffing the postcards in his jacket pocket.

As it turned out, the guest had suffered only a bad sprain. Reed was obviously concerned but relieved that it was nothing more serious. But when they came in sight of the lodge, his jaw tightened again as two staff members and a man in the uniform of the state police came hurrying to meet them.

Ricky hung back, watching as they spoke to his father. Then, steeling himself, he advanced to join them.

"Dad, what is it?"

Reed's face was white, his mouth trembling. "Something terrible's happened. The jeep missed the curve— It went into the gorge."

"But you said Cheryl was— Oh, God! Is she—"

Reed's voice broke. "Cheryl's dead, Ricky."

Later that afternoon Ricky went to his room, opened his suitcase, and put something in his pocket. Then he picked up the box of French creams, still not wrapped, and carrying it under his arm he walked down the corridor, up the stairs to a door leading into a patio off the gym, and across the patio into the woods beyond. He was conscious of a feeling of acute relief that it had happened the way it did, even if he hadn't planned it that way. Winslow was supposed to have been in the jeep, not Cheryl. It was Winslow who had given him the idea about the brakes when Ricky had followed Cheryl to the cabin and stood listening outside the window. But now he felt no rancor against the man. What chance did any guy have against Cheryl? What chance had his father had? What chance would he himself have had, for that matter, if she hadn't left his room the other night before anything had happened?

Deep in the woods he tossed the box of candy down a shallow ravine. Then he knelt on the ground and buried the little vial of clear liquid there would now be no reason to plant in Clay's room. He had retraced his steps almost to the trail before realizing his carelessness. Returning to the ravine, he scrambled down the slope, retrieved the box of candy, and spent the next few minutes burying that deeply as well.

The last thing he wanted to do was poison some innocent animal.

How to Order

**Spring-Summer 1981
Edition Volume 8**

alfred

HITCHCOCK'S

anthology

☐ Enclosed is \$3.15 (\$2.50 plus 65¢ handling & postage) for each of _____ Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology(s) Volume #8.

Name _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Mail to: Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology
380 Lexington Avenue, NYC, NY 10017

The bomb was set to explode by midnight . . .

THE BLACK BOX

by
**HERSCHEL
COZINE**



Grayson huddled on the thin mattress, as far away as possible from the ominous black box. It was a futile gesture, he knew, guided by fear rather than reason. If and when the box blew up, he was no safer here than if he was sitting on it.

A battery-powered lamp threw off a harsh light that bleached the concrete walls with artificial greyness. On the wall by the door was a telephone without a dial. A few necessities—the lamp, food, water, and reading

material—were all that had been provided. And there was the box.

The cold panic that had knotted Grayson's stomach grew stronger, threatening to immobilize him. He struggled to his feet and went to the telephone, willing it to ring. It was his only contact with the man who had kidnapped him. Grayson couldn't use the phone to call out, although he had tried desperately by jiggling the hook, hoping to alert someone at the phone company. But in this age of computerized switchboards, no one took notice of the flashing light, if indeed there were any.

The phone had rung once since Grayson had awakened from a drugged sleep several hours ago.

"Mr. Grayson," the deep, impersonal voice had said, "listen carefully to what I have to say. Your life may depend on it."

"Who are you?" Grayson shouted. "What do you want?"

"Just listen, Grayson," the voice cut in impatiently. "As you have undoubtedly discovered by now, there is a metal box in the room with you. It is set to explode by midnight tomorrow unless Expo International comes up with a million dollars."

"A million dollars? I'm not worth that kind of money to them!"

"You underestimate your value, Grayson. As Vice President in charge of Research and Development, you hold the key to many lucrative projects in your head. They'll pay."

Through the pounding of his whirling thoughts, Grayson strained to hear the voice on the other end of the line.

"When I receive the money," the man continued, "I will phone you with instructions for deactivating the bomb. The key to your door will be sent to your employer, along with your location."

"But—" Grayson started.

"A word of warning, Grayson. The door cannot be opened without setting the bomb off. You must deactivate it from the inside. So it is important that you stay alert. I'll be in touch."

"Wait!" Grayson shouted.

There was a click and the phone went dead. In the eerie, oppressive silence, Grayson wanted to scream. He suppressed the urge and slumped on the mattress. Although there were vents in the ceiling, the air was heavy and Grayson labored hard to breathe. His eyes were drawn back to the box. Forcing himself to move, he crossed the room and studied the object.

There were seven switches in a line on the top of the box. Each switch.

was numbered. The key to disarming the bomb, Grayson concluded, was to turn the switches off in a certain sequence. Seven switches. Grayson did some mental arithmetic. 5040 possible combinations.

Grayson felt the twinges of claustrophobia gnawing at him. He had to control himself. With an effort, he concentrated on other things. He closed his eyes and tried to picture Ellen, his wife of fifteen years, who was still as beautiful as the day they met. But the image never came into focus. Instead his thoughts tumbled over one another, slowly fading in the shadow of the black box.

Searching frantically for a way to escape, Grayson studied the room as if for the first time. The floor was made of cement, as was the ceiling. There were no windows. The vents were too small for anything larger than a squirrel. He considered setting the mattress on fire, hoping someone would see the smoke, but he had no matches. The musty odor of mildew that stained the walls suggested that the place, wherever it was, had not been used for a long time.

The phone rang and Grayson's raw nerves reacted violently to the sound. With shaking hands he picked up the receiver.

"Mr. Grayson." The disembodied voice that he had come to fear, yet at the same time depended on to keep his sanity, crackled over the line. "Mr. Flanders of Expo International wants to speak with you, so he can see for himself that you are still alive."

Grayson heard the sound of another phone being dialed, followed by muffled conversation. Then the faint, familiar voice of Alfred Flanders came over the line.

"Everett?"

"All!" Grayson said. "My God, it's good to hear your voice!"

"Are you all right? Where are you?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to be blown to bits if Expo doesn't come up with the money."

"We're working on it, Ev."

"There's not much time."

The gruff voice of the kidnapper cut him off. "Are you satisfied, Mr. Flanders?"

"Yes. I guess so."

"Call Ellen for me," Grayson said quickly. "Tell her I'm O.K." He wasn't certain Flanders had heard. The cold silence filled the room like a shroud. "All!" he shouted, and the sound was swallowed up in the dim

recesses of the room. A dizzying wave of nausea swept over him and he sank to the floor. The fear of imminent death acted like a drug, dulling his senses. He felt the urge to laugh, yet at the same time he wanted to scream. Hysteria. He couldn't allow that to happen.

The digital watch on his wrist read 3:00. Morning or afternoon? He had no idea. Either way, the minutes were precious. The important thing was to stay calm and try to find a way out of the place. He had to get someone's attention.

The telephone. He knew something about how phones worked. If he could remove the case he might be able to connect the wires in such a way that he could dial the phone, call the operator, and have the call traced.

Two screws held the cover in place. Grayson fumbled in his pocket, found his nail clippers, and worked the screws loose with the file. There were several wires of various colors secured to a terminal plate by brass screws. He disconnected one and touched it to another terminal. The phone crackled, then went dead. He replaced the wire and loosened another. His hands were shaking so badly he dropped the screw. Dropping down on his hands and knees, he patted the dusty floor until he found it. With a sigh of relief he replaced the wire and tightened the screw. He couldn't afford to take a chance on crossing the wires and leaving himself without a line of communication. He replaced the case and hung up the phone.

Almost immediately it rang.

"You've been tampering with the phone, Grayson," the deep voice said accusingly. "I wouldn't do that if I were you. It is your lifeline in more ways than you realize."

"Do you have the money?" Grayson asked, and was immediately ashamed of the pleading in his voice.

"Not yet, but Flanders assures me Expo will deliver. For your sake, he had better be telling the truth."

"Please," Grayson heard himself saying, "tell me how to turn that bomb off. You'll get the money. As God is my witness, I'll see to it."

"Sorry, Grayson. It's important that my deadline is irrevocable. Time works against people like me. Too many things can go wrong."

"No one would have to know."

"You'd know and I'd know. No deal."

Grayson heard the clatter of the receiver as the man hung up. He stood

staring at the phone for several seconds, frustration building up within him. Then, in a burst of unbridled terror, he threw himself against the wall. He bounced off and landed awkwardly on the mattress. A sharp pain shot through his shoulder. He ignored it and got up. With his nail file he scraped at a crack in the wall, dislodging tiny chunks of concrete. He was aware of the futility of his efforts, but the activity was therapeutic and he worked until his hands and arms refused to move. Near exhaustion, he lay down and fell into a fitful sleep.

The sharp ringing of the telephone brought him back to a disoriented wakefulness.

"Grayson," the man said, "Expo is ready to pay off. Stay awake. As soon as I have the money I'll be in touch with you."

"When?"

"Within the hour if all goes well. It's nine-fifteen now. That gives us nearly three hours."

Grayson, fully awake now, glanced at his watch. "That's not enough time," he said. "Suppose something comes up that you or Expo has no control over? Let me have the combination now."

"No, not until I have the money in my hands and am safely on my way. Wish me luck, Grayson. I know you'll mean it." He chuckled and hung up.

Grayson spent the next hour hunched by the phone, like a tiger waiting to spring at the first sound. The minutes ticked by, edging toward ten o'clock with agonizing slowness. Ten-thirty. Grayson stood up, stretched and paced the floor.

Eleven o'clock came and went. Something must have gone wrong. Grayson put the thought out of his mind. The precious seconds stretched into minutes.

The phone rang. Grayson lunged for it, picking it up before it had completed its first ring.

"Is that you, Mr. Grayson?" The voice, unfamiliar to him, spoke with some hesitancy.

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Joel Templeton, FBI."

"What? How—?" Grayson stammered. "Get off the line! I've got to keep it open!"

"Your kidnapper, Harold Mayes, has had an accident. He panicked and ran off the road after he picked up the money."

Grayson's knees went weak and he sat down on the damp floor.

"I'm afraid he's dead," Templeton said. "But we found this phone number and your name in his pocket. The phone company is having the number checked right now."

"But there's no time!" Grayson screamed. "It's eleven-twenty! The bomb will go off in forty minutes!"

"We're working as fast as we can. The phone number is a local one—527-6134—we can be there in minutes."

Grayson repeated the number to himself, still reeling from the shock. "Why is the FBI involved?"

"Routine, sir," Templeton said, and the officiousness in his voice as he uttered the cliché was infuriating.

"There's nothing 'routine' about this!" Grayson told him. "I've got to have that combination, and I've got to have it *fast*!"

"We're aware of that, sir. And we're doing everything possible." There was a pause and Grayson heard a rustle of papers followed by Templeton's worried response. "—That can't *be*."

"What is it? What can't *be*?" Grayson said.

"The phone number we have isn't in service. The last subscriber moved three weeks ago, and the phone was removed from the house." There was another pause as papers were shuffled, then Templeton spoke again, excitedly. "The serviceman who removed the telephone was Harold Mayes."

"So Mayes worked for the phone company," Grayson said, dismissing the information impatiently. "He installed the phone here. What good does that do me?" He wiped perspiration from his forehead. "Weren't there any other papers on him? Numbers? A sequence that would tell me how to turn this damn thing off?"

"I'm sorry, sir. But we're having the phone company trace this call right now. Stay on the line until they locate you."

How long did it take to trace a phone call? Grayson wondered. Every minute spent was irretrievable.

A strange voice cut through the low hum of the phone wires. "We have a general fix on the location. The phone is an unauthorized installation so we have no record of it, but it's south of town, somewhere within a mile radius of the PG&E substation."

"A bunker!" Grayson said. "Of course! I'm in one of those old World War II ammo bunkers off Thatcher Road!"

"We're on our way," Templeton said. "There's a helicopter waiting outside. We'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"Wait!" Grayson said. "You won't be able to use the door. The bomb is rigged to explode if the door is opened before I deactivate it."

"O.K.," Templeton said, "we'll have PG&E send a crew out there with jackhammers and drills. We'll come in through the wall."

"But there must be thirty bunkers out here. How will you find the right one?"

"We'll look for one that has a telephone wire leading to it."

It was 11:45 when Grayson heard the first rumble of the trucks outside. Through the thick walls buried in the side of a hill, the sound was barely audible. The walls vibrated slightly as the jackhammers pounded against the side of the bunker. Bits of concrete tore loose from the ceiling and cascaded to the floor in a shower of dust. Grayson coughed and covered his mouth with his handkerchief. The shrill screech of metal against metal pierced the air. Then silence.

Grayson's throat tightened as he realized what the sound meant. The walls were reinforced with steel. He looked at his watch. 11:55. Not even the most powerful equipment could cut through the steel in time to save him.

Suddenly something clicked in the back of his mind—a comment that Mayes had made during one of his calls. It had held little meaning for Grayson at the time. But now, with the information Templeton had given him, it meant the difference between life and death.

Grayson hurried over to the bomb. For a brief second he studied the array of switches. If he was wrong, or if his memory failed him—well, it would only hasten his death by a few minutes. His brain recoiled at the thought of touching the switches. Twice he extended his hand only to draw it back at the last moment. His hands were trembling, but he steeled himself.

On the third try, he turned off one of the switches, his heart nearly stopping at the sound of the click.

The explosion did not come. He threw another switch, still braced in anticipation. But when the only sound was the sharp click of the switch, he relaxed.

Working more confidently now, he turned off the remaining switches. Then, in a flood of relief, he went limp and wept.

Fifteen minutes later, he stepped through the jagged hole in the wall and into the arms of his hysterical wife. He held her tight.

A thin red-haired man with rimless glasses and an official look broke away from the crowd of onlookers and approached Grayson. With a fleeting smile he extended his hand. "Joe Templeton," he said. "Thank God you're safe."

Grayson shook the man's hand, keeping his other arm around his wife. "What happened in there?" Templeton asked, nodding toward the bunker. "We didn't expect to find you alive."

"I disarmed the bomb."

"How?"

"Very carefully," Grayson laughed. "And with a little luck."

"I don't understand," Templeton said.

"Mayes told me the telephone was my lifeline in more ways than I realized," Grayson said. "He was referring to the phone number. Think about it, Templeton. Seven numbers, no two alike, but all the numbers, one through seven, are there. Mayes set the switches in the same order, probably to make it easier for him to remember the sequence."

Templeton nodded appreciatively, and for a moment his eyes mirrored a tension that was quickly masked by the official tone of his voice. "We'll need you to answer some questions, Mr. Grayson."

"They can wait," Grayson said. "Right now, all I want to do is go home." He took his wife by the arm and fought his way to their car through a sea of probing microphones and exploding flashbulbs.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

Corey's evidence was enough to finish the kid off . . .

THE OPAL NECKLACE

by
**PAULINE
C. SMITH**



Wedged into a booth, Smith crowded the space between the table and bench. The white foam of his beer bubbled down into amber as he listened to the voices around him. They were disjointed beads, strung together with the word "guilty."

When the tavern door opened, letting in the hot breath of the street, Smith left off his blank contemplation to take in the newcomer. His face brightened. He watched the man consider the occupied bar stools. Lean-

ing forward, he crooked a fat finger. "Full up, Doc. You can share my booth."

He watched the man's indecision. "Cooler under the fan," he suggested.

The man glanced up at the rotating blades stirring the sluggish air. He leaned over the bar, said a few words to the bartender, and walked stiffly toward the booth.

"Hot, ain't it?" said Smith.

"It is warm," agreed the man with reserve.

"Hotter in the courtroom though."

The man's face closed up.

Someone put a coin in the jukebox to make a clarinet cry. A baritone wept for his lost love.

"Your name's Corey, ain't it?"

Corey shifted, half rose, then, seeing the bartender cross the narrow aisle with his drink, reluctantly settled down again.

"Kind of the star witness in that trial they're havin'." While Corey paid off the bartender, Smith studied the delicate, sagging lines of his face.

A man at the bar laughed, another joined in. The baritone sobbed from the jukebox. After the bartender had gone, Smith leaned forward, grunting with effort. "You kind of sewed the kid up, didn't you?"

The words were a needle slipped under the skin. Corey started.

"Well—" Smith shrugged—"if the kid's guilty he's guilty." He sat back, surveying his companion.

"But—" Corey picked up his glass and set it down again without drinking.

"But what?" Smith cocked his head. "You don't think he's guilty? There's plenty of evidence against him. At least it looks like evidence to me. Looks that way to the jury too."

Corey's eyes turned blank.

"After you got on the stand anyway. Up till then it was anybody's picnic. But you brought the hamburgers."

The tap of a glass on the bar picked out the downbeat of the music. The tavern doors opened and closed like a bellows pumping in heat.

"I was under oath," Corey protested. Then, remotely: "I only repeated what I saw."

"Well, the kid was probably a dead pigeon anyhow." Smith looked up brightly. "This is my only day of the trial so I wouldn't know." Listening for a moment, he let the orchestra wind up and finish off, then the jukebox

went dead. "From what I hear there was almost enough evidence against him already. There was Fansler, and the gardener who seen this Henry Brockton leave the place in a sweat. And the housekeeper." Smith narrowed his eyes across the table.

Corey met them without expression.

"And then there was yours," Smith finished.

Defensively, Corey pushed himself forward. "I just happened to see him go by that day."

Smith nodded. "The day of the murder. Right after the killing."

Corey braced himself, his thin fingers against the table. "About that time." Blindly, he studied the tapering elegance of his own hands against the beer-stained table. "But that's purely circumstantial."

"Enough to finish the kid off," said Smith. He smiled. "So you don't think he's guilty?"

"I didn't say that."

"You think he's gettin' a raw deal then." Smith took a drink and passed the back of his wrist over his mouth. "You like the kid."

"I don't know him very well," Corey said evasively. "He comes from good people."

Smith shoved his glass aside and rubbed the wet ring with a fat forefinger. "Good people?" he asked, gazing at the smear on the table. "It didn't sound like it in the courtroom what with all the yackin' about 'like father, like son.'"

Corey's lips tightened for a moment. "A typical trick of the prosecution. It was stricken out, remember? The judge told the jury to forget it."

"Juries always remember the things they're told to forget. And it looked like they all remembered that before they were told not to. It sounded like maybe something of the same sort happened to the Brockton kid's dad. Did it?"

"No."

"It must've. It must have been a killing too."

Corey cleared his throat. "There was an accident years ago, when Henry was still a small boy. But it was an accident."

Smith showed his interest. "Well, for an accident, it sure raised an awful stink in the courtroom." Resting his elbows on the table, he waited. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a customer start toward the jukebox, search the coins from his pocket, shrug, and return to his stool.

The lines of Corey's face hardened and his voice became argumentative.

"But it *was* an accident. A car accident. Brockton, Henry's father, was driving. His wife, Henry's mother, was the only passenger when they went off the cliff. Brockton was able to jump free. His wife was killed."

"Oh."

"There was talk, of course."

"Sure."

"But nothing more. No arraignment, no indictment."

"Lucky. It ain't turnin' out so lucky for the kid though."

"It wasn't so lucky for Brockton. He committed suicide. And the town called it guilty conscience."

"Leavin' the kid all alone."

Corey's face turned aloof.

"Tough. A kid left to shift for himself."

"An aunt took him in," said Corey stiffly.

Smith mopped his brow. His eyes wandered along the hunched backs on the bar stools. "There's always someone left to take the rap," he reflected. "Kinda rotten, though, wasn't it? Of Brockton, I mean." He watched Corey toy with his glass. "First he kills the kid's mother—"

"That was an accident."

"O.K., but the suicide—"

Corey stared at him in irritation. "The man was grief-stricken, hounded by talk."

"So he couldn't take it. Maybe the boy's that way too. Goes to pieces when things look tough or when he gets mad."

"That's what the prosecution would have us believe." Corey grasped the edge of the table as if he were pleading for his own compassion. "But a man's entire life shouldn't be judged by one incident."

"It takes only one incident," said Smith. "Like with the kid." He took a drink of his beer. "So you don't think the kid committed the murder."

"I didn't say that." Corey pulled back petulantly. "I just don't know."

The bartender came around to the table and raised his eyebrows. Almost imperceptibly, Smith shook his head. "You don't know the kid very well?" he asked.

"Henry? No. He came back to town a couple of years ago to attend college here."

Smith nodded. "Workin' his way through?"

"Yes. At whatever odd jobs he could get. He was working for the Fanslers when she was killed."

"Mm-hm."

"But he didn't kill her."

"How do you know that?"

"I mean I don't see how he could have killed her."

"You saw him come out of the place at four-thirty and go tearin' off down the road."

"Yes, I did. He picked up a stick from the road and slashed it about as he walked." Twisting his glass, Corey gazed at it intently. "But I should think," he said slowly, "I should think, had he killed her, his anger would have left him. It should have spent itself with the killing." Setting his glass down, he stared at Smith.

"Yeah. I'd think so too."

Corey leaned forward. "Then you don't believe Henry killed her?"

Smith laughed. "Listen, I never been in this town before in my life. All I know about the case I picked up from the papers—until today, when I got stuck here on business. With a few hours to kill, I squeezed myself into that courtroom to watch the show." He tapped a slow scherzo on the tabletop with pudgy fingers. "This Henry Brockton looked like a nice kid to me. Kind of clean-cut."

Eagerly, Corey nodded.

"The woman," said Smith slowly, "the woman who was killed—"

Corey's face closed. "Mina Fansler."

"People hated her?"

"She was unpopular," temporized Corey.

"Hard on her help?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Plenty of dough, right?"

"She was quite wealthy."

"So," Smith asked, "who gets it?"

"Why, her husband, I suppose."

"How's he fixed?"

Corey looked off into the shadows. "Financially?"

"Yeah. Financially. Personally. Before his wife was conveniently bumped off so he could inherit hers."

"I'm not sure."

"But you think he's not well heeled—without his wife's money?"

Corey looked directly at Smith. "That is what I think."

Resting the heels of his chubby hands against the table edge, Smith

bent over, regarding his companion. "Don't it seem funny to you that he married his housekeeper so soon after his wife's murder?"

"Well, yes and no. It's been almost six months since the first Mrs. Fansler's death. There have been trial postponements."

"When did they get married, Fansler and his housekeeper?"

"A couple of weeks ago."

"Just before the trial, huh?"

"About a week before. Fansler said it didn't look right to have the housekeeper staying there all the time with no other woman on the place. He said, for the sake of convenience and to protect her good name, it was the best thing to do."

Smith laughed. Corey watched him, puzzled.

"He didn't have to worry about her good name."

Corey bristled. "How do you know? You said you were a stranger here. How would you know anything about the housekeeper?"

Smith's mouth twisted in a half grin. "'Cause I was married to her, brother," he said. "I was married to her."

Corey's mouth fell open. "You were *married* to her? The new Mrs. Fansler?"

Smith chuckled. "The new Mrs. Fansler. The housekeeper. Ada Smith that was." His eyes narrowed. "My name's Smith. Don't know if I told you that."

Corey shook his head.

"Well, Smith's a common enough name. I didn't think too much of it when I read about this Ada Smith in the newspaper. There must be dozens of 'em, maybe hundreds." He leaned forward. "But when I had to make this burg, I got kinda curious and thought I'd look in on the show for a while. It was Ada all right. I saw her on the bench with the witness. It was Ada, twenty years older and with more padding on her."

"Didn't make me a bit homesick for her," he went on. His small eyes flared. "She was a two-timing, money-greedy—" He stopped. "She was no good," he finished.

"Why, I thought—" said Corey softly. "She's always seemed—"

"Yeah, she can *seem* real nice. But she ain't." Smith leaned back on the bench. "I feel sorry for this Henry Brockton. I think he's caught in a bind—he's a fall guy for somebody."

Corey sat erect. "There isn't any evidence at all in his favor," he said sharply.

"I only seen this one day of the trial," admitted Smith. "I don't know too much about the setup. There's not much in the city newspapers about a trial in a town this far out."

"Well," said Corey, spreading his long white hands. "Henry had been working at the Fanslers' a couple of hours a day, cleaning the garage and the basement, helping the gardener. On the day of—on the day in question—I understand he went into the house to ask Mrs. Fansler about a missing tool, I don't know what it was, and according to his testimony she accused him of stealing it."

Smith snorted. "She was rich, wasn't she? What'd she care about one measly tool more or less?"

Corey hunched his shoulders. "All I know is what came out at the trial. Henry says they had an argument over a tool."

"Did anyone else hear this fight?"

Corey shook his head. "Just the loud voices, but they didn't know what it was about. We have only Henry's word as to its triviality. He claims he blew up and stormed out of the house, leaving Mrs. Fansler alive. The gardener who saw him leave testified as to his anger. I saw him pass my house and I *know* he was angry."

"What do Fansler and Ada say?"

"According to their testimony, the housekeeper entered the room where the alleged argument had taken place about five minutes after Henry left. She found Mrs. Fansler lying in a pool of blood and she ran and called Mr. Fansler."

"The woman's throat was cut, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"What about the knife or razor or whatever was used?"

"It was a pocket knife. They found it in the fish pond a week or so later."

"I suppose young Brockton had to pass the fish pond to get out of the grounds?"

Corey nodded.

"And I suppose it was his knife?"

"He acknowledged it was. He claimed to have lost it somewhere on the grounds a few days before."

"It looks pretty black for him, don't it?"

"I'm afraid it does."

Smith grunted and finished his beer. "Ada could probably tell more."

That marriage is a phony. She's got the finger on Fansler." He looked up suddenly. "With Fansler havin' all that money he's not about to hitch up with his housekeeper without he has to. You know Ada's no glamour puss—at least not now she ain't."

Corey sat quietly, not moving.

"You see Ada much around the house?" asked Smith casually.

"The housekeeper? The new Mrs. Fansler?" Corey thought a moment.

"Quite often. Out in the garden. She cuts fresh flowers every day."

"Yeah. She likes pretty things." Smith chuckled. "Ever notice them beads she wears around her neck?"

Corey shook his head.

"They're opals. She wears 'em all the time. I seen she had 'em on today. Like fiery eyes against her skin. I hated the things, but she loved 'em—said they brought her luck."

"I thought—" Corey murmured. "At least, there's a common superstition that opals bring misfortune."

Smith wagged a mocking finger. "It's according to your birthdate. Now, in Ada's case, opals was her fairy godmother or something, her bein' an October baby." He mopped his brow and looked around the room, his face tightening. "She was the gimme type, boy. Gimme a diamond ring. Gimme a fur coat. 'Honey,' I says to her, 'you can have diamonds strung all around that pretty neck of yours if you'll just wait.'" Smith looked at Corey belligerently. "She could've too. I made my pile, just like I said I would. But when I said that about the necklace she grabbed them opals and said she didn't want any other beads, then she fingered each one of 'em like she always did. She'd touch 'em, one after the other till I thought I'd go nuts.

"Like this—" Smith pressed a pudgy forefinger against his thumb. He repeated the gesture, like a snapping mouth around his turned-down collar. "When she got worried over something she'd feel each bead. When she tried to worm herself out of a spot she did it too. She'd start at the clasp and work around to it from the other side. By the time she got there she had her answer ready and pat.

"She did, that is," he amended, "until one time. Ada was pretty, you understand. She liked to be on the go and get attention and have people give her presents—especially guys." Smith's round face turned hard. "I started hearin' things." Looking apologetically at Corey, he confided softly, "She shouldn't've run around, you know? I was crazy about her."

He patted his stomach. "And I didn't have all this suet on me then neither."

Corey watched him, eyes fixed.

"I hoped," Smith explained wearily, "she'd tell me I was wrong. I hoped she had a good excuse. But the minute I yelled about what I'd been hearin' she grabbed hold o' them damned beads." Smith clamped his forefinger and thumb together until the tips were white. "I pulled her hands away and held 'em, hollerin' at her to tell me the truth. She did too—tryin' to jerk her hands away all the time, yappin' out the rotten truth to me."

Smiling then, and finally relaxed, Smith continued. "She told me all about how she'd got her good times and her presents. Then I let go of her hands and she went back to fingerin' them opals."

Corey sat back through Smith's short silence.

"Then I up and kicked her out."

A man slipped from a bar stool and walked across the room. He concentrated on the numbers offered by the juke box. The records slapped into place and Satchmo's gravel voice poured out.

Heaving himself to his feet, Smith looked down at Corey. "I don't think Ada's told all she knows. Not by a long shot. But she can be made to talk." His putty face turned passive. "Well, who knows? Maybe the kid, Henry Brockton, is guilty anyway. That's for you to decide."

He started away from the booth.

"Smith!" called Corey. The fat man turned around. "How could I—" Then, seeing the hooded expression, "Are you going to be in town tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow I'm headed outta this place. Leavin' on the eight-thirty train in the morning."

"In the morning?"

"Yeah. I'll be at the station about eight. In case I don't see you again, I'm glad I met you, and good luck. That is, if I don't see you again." He wheeled slowly and walked through the tavern door and the voice from the juke box dwindled in the heat of the street.

It was still hot the next morning—oppressive heat that nuzzled through the cracks of the old station walls and beat down from its roof.

Smith wiped perspiration from the flushed folds on his face. The clock on the wall said eight-fifteen. "Oh, well," he said, half aloud, "I never

expected him anyhow. That kind's got no guts. Too nice to pull themselves out of their shell. Too scared to do anything."

Seconds later he received a touch on his shoulder. He turned to stare into Corey's weary face. Searching it, he found nothing but exhaustion there.

He mopped his throat, digging his handkerchief into the deep puckers of skin.

"She confessed," said Corey.

Reaching a hand behind him, Smith groped for something to lean on. Corey nudged him to a bench.

"She lied at the inquest and she lied at the trial." Corey sat down beside him, his mouth slack, his color grey. "When I went home yesterday I waited on my terrace, which overlooks the Fansler gardens. It wasn't long before she came out with the clipping shears. I walked through the hedge and joined her by the flower beds."

Smith was staring out at the street, out into the shimmering heat haze.

"She was startled, I think. I've never been neighborly. I mentioned the weather and the trial and how Henry was probably going to be found guilty." Corey passed a thin white wrist over his forehead. "Her hand with the clipping shears started to reach up to her throat. Then she saw what it held, so she fingered the opals with her free hand."

Looking sharply at Smith, who was still gazing out the window, Corey said, "She started to touch each one, just as you told me she would."

Smith nodded.

"I moved her hand away from the necklace and held it, asking her if Henry was really guilty. She looked frightened and dropped the shears so I caught her other hand. Then I questioned her—rather rudely, I'm afraid—and you were right. As soon as I blocked her obsession, the frustration seemed to act like a truth serum. The words tumbled from her in her anxiety to get at the opals. She blurted it all out—how she saw Mrs. Fansler alive directly after Henry left and how, five minutes later, while she was attending to her regular duties, she heard the sound that sent her to the drawing-room door, where she saw Fansler standing over his wife's dead body. He had just finished cutting her throat with Henry's knife."

"Fansler?" Smith turned his startled gaze from the street to Corey. His eyes grew round. "Fansler murdered the woman?"

"Yes. Wasn't that what you thought?"

"I thought Ada had. I thought she'd made it up with Fansler. If she killed his wife, he was to marry her and share the inheritance."

"You were sending your former wife to the gas chamber?"

Smith clenched his fists. "She was no good, I tell you. Now what'll they get her for? Perjury?"

"As an accessory, maybe. I don't know. She told Fansler she'd support his implication of Henry if he'd give her ten thousand dollars. They made the agreement and she testified at the inquest. Then, I suppose, she reviewed the situation and came to the conclusion that she could buy herself lifetime security with her information, so she threatened exposure unless Fansler married her and shared the inheritance. It's all down on paper now. Fansler's been apprehended, and so has your former wife."

The sound of a train slowing on the tracks outside thundered through the building.

Smith reached down for his bag and hauled himself to his feet. He looked at Corey. "Well, Henry Brockton'll go free now."

"Yes. Henry will go free."

Smith reached out a pudgy paw.

Corey looked at it, shook his head. "No, I think not. I don't know quite why, Mr. Smith, because you just saved a boy's life. But I guess I don't want to shake your hand."

Smith stuck his fist in his pocket.

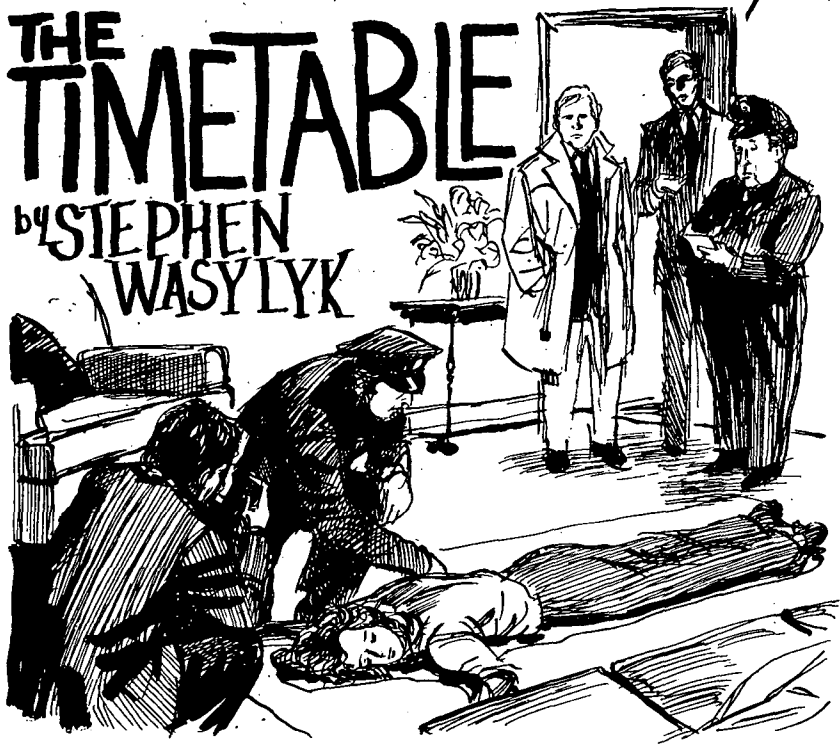
"Well," he said, "maybe I don't blame you none at that."

The July 22 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale June 25.

A great deal can happen in three minutes, not much in three years . . .

THE TIMETABLE

by STEPHEN
WASYLYK



Even if Hoke Beckett hadn't been familiar with the house, locating it would have been no problem. The small knot of curious neighbors gathered under the leafless trees was a landmark on a street that would otherwise be deserted at that hour of a chilly fall night.

He pulled up behind a police car whose reflected headlights painted the faces of the dark-robed onlookers white and left them floating in the darkness, a macabre and silent audience to tragedy. Spocker, bulking big

in his topcoat, met him halfway up the walk that led to an undistinguished stone house that had a sectioned bay window and an arch over the front door. A few feet away was another, a mirror image sharing the walk; only a narrow passage separated the two.

The stout man held the door open. "In here, Hoke."

The familiar room was warm and comfortable, bookshelves lining one wall, a piano in the corner, a sofa some feet from the bay window. A middle-aged woman in a cardigan sweater and slacks lay on the rug before the sofa, her head resting on one arm as though she were asleep, but even from across the room the bruises on her throat were apparent.

"Strangled?" asked Beckett.

Spocker nodded, scratching a fleshy jawl. "From the looks of it. And it looks like Professor Harwood did it. We have a sort of witness—"

"A sort of witness?"

"Well, a neighbor saw two shadows that seemed to be struggling on the blind and called us. Newcombe and Reilly took the call. When they arrived, Reilly covered the back and Newcombe went to the front door. The professor answered. He was the only one in the house. He said he found his wife dead when he came home. I asked if he had called it in. He said he hadn't had time, that Newcombe arrived right after he did." He indicated the doorway that led to the back of the house. "He's in there now with Newcombe."

"Where's the witness?"

"Next door. He lives there. His name is Melrose. He was out walking the dog and saw the shadows. He knocked on the door and when he got no answer he went home and called us. Newcombe says they were here within three minutes, so it isn't likely they missed someone running out of the house."

"You know what to do," Beckett told him and walked through the doorway.

The man seated at the dining-room table was small and thin, hunched deep in his topcoat. Even though the house was warm, he appeared cold, his face so white that his big black-framed spectacles gave him an owlish look.

"What happened here, Professor?"

Harwood's lips trembled and he took a deep breath. "I wish I knew. I finished my evening class and caught the ten-fifteen as usual, walked from the station, and—" he made a little gesture "—I found her like that.

While I was standing there the bell rang. It was the police."

"She was already dead when you came home?"

Harwood nodded.

"Did you see anyone leave the house or notice anyone suspicious in the vicinity when you let yourself in?"

"No one."

"And you had no time to call the police."

Harwood's shoulders lifted. "I couldn't even think."

"Was the door locked when you arrived?"

"Yes." His eyes appealed to Beckett. "I have to call Julie, Hoke."

"Of course." Beckett placed a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry."

Harwood nodded and went to the phone.

"Do you notice anything missing?" Beckett asked Newcombe.

"Nothing obvious. Reilly took a quick check. He said nothing appeared to be disturbed."

"When Harwood finishes talking to his daughter, take him in for questioning."

Beckett went through the house, finding a door in the kitchen with a snap lock that could be opened without a key from the inside but required one to enter. He flipped a light switch on the wall and pulled the door open. A bright floodlight mounted high on the back of the house illuminated a long, narrow yard bisected by a cement walk lined with rose bushes. He stepped from the small cement porch and went down the walk. The rose bushes hadn't been trimmed back and had overgrown the walk slightly. At the foot of the walk was a metal gate that opened onto a narrow alleyway between the houses on this side and those on the next street. Beckett turned. In the glare of the light, he spotted a small piece of cloth caught on one of the rose thorns. Removing it carefully, he tucked it into an envelope, placed it in his pocket, and went back around to the front of the house to ring the bell of the one next door.

The man who answered was half bald, stout, and middle-aged. Beside him, a dog of uncertain breed eyed Beckett speculatively.

"I'm Police Lieutenant Beckett, Mr. Melrose."

Melrose motioned him inside. "Come in—sit down."

The dog rested his head on Beckett's knee. Beckett scratched him behind the ears. Satisfied, the dog retreated and lay down at Melrose's feet.

"What made you think there was trouble next door?"

"The shadows I saw on the blind seemed to be struggling. Something like that—well, it's unusual in a home like the Harwoods'."

"Did you see the professor at any time?"

"No, but I knew he was home. I take the dog for his walk every night at the same time and usually run into Harwood on his way home from the train. We were a little late tonight so we must have missed him."

Beckett rose. "We'll need a statement, Mr. Melrose. I'll send a man to take you to headquarters."

He stepped out into the night as a young man and woman hurried up the walk. The woman was tall, her long hair coppery in the light beside the doorway. She was wearing a heavy pullover and slacks. The dark-haired man beside her was dressed more formally in a grey three-piece suit.

She stopped. "Hoke. My father said—"

"I'm sorry."

She stiffened as if she hadn't believed it until then, her hand covering her mouth, then she started forward.

Beckett barred her way. "You don't want to go in there, Julie. There's nothing you can do."

"My father—"

"He's not inside. You'll find him in the Municipal Building."

"You've arrested him?"

"He was taken in for questioning." Anger flared in her eyes. "Take it easy. He was alone with her when the officer arrived. I had no choice."

"You know him better."

"I haven't seen him in three years."

"People don't change in three years."

"Don't they?" asked Beckett quietly. Her eyes fell. "Besides, you wouldn't want him to spend the night here, would you? Go down to headquarters and wait for him. After I'm through talking with him again, you can take him home with you."

"All right, Hoke. You always had a reason for everything you did." Her eyes found the doorway of the house and filled with tears. "Why? Why did it happen?"

"I don't know yet, but things like this do happen. Now go down to the Municipal Building. I'll see you there."

He watched them drive away and turned to find Spocker behind him.

"Find anything?"

"No sign of a break-in," Spocker said. "Every window is locked tight. Whoever killed her didn't force his way in. It looks more and more like the professor. How long since you've seen him, Hoke?"

"Julie and I broke up three years ago."

"Think he could do it?"

"I don't know. It's difficult to tell about people. He's a quiet man. His wife was just the opposite—a little loud and opinionated, inclined to say what she was thinking without worrying about people's feelings. I suppose she rubbed many people the wrong way—including him at times—but whether that's reason enough for murder I don't know. We'll need a statement from Melrose, so have someone take him in. Then finish here. Make sure you get to as many neighbors as you can tonight, see if they know anything."

Newcombe and the professor were seated in Beckett's office, the professor holding a cup of coffee, staring at it as if he were watching it grow cold.

When Beckett walked in, Newcombe rose. "You need me any more, Hoke?"

"No. Go make out your report. Captain Tolley will want it on his desk in the morning."

He looked at Harwood for a few moments, then walked over and took the coffee cup from him. "Who had a reason to kill her?"

Harwood shrugged. "I don't know. An intruder—"

"No. No one broke in. She opened the door for whoever it was. Had you had any trouble recently?"

"We never had trouble with anyone," Harwood said wearily. "The only—" He broke off, went to the window, and stood, his hands in his pockets, staring out over the sleeping town.

"Go on," said Beckett. "I'll find out anyway."

"The only thing you might call trouble was between Marian and Scott." "Julie's husband?"

Harwood nodded. "When Scott and Julie were first married, we lent him some money for his shop. For some reason Marian decided she wanted the money returned. Scott was in no position to do that right now, but it didn't make any difference to Marian. She still insisted. We all tried to explain it to her but she refused to understand. You know how

she could be when she didn't get her way, Hoke. Snide, demeaning remarks—outright insults. She even went so far as to call him a thief."

"How did Scott react?"

"Naturally, both he and Julie resented it. Two nights ago they walked out and said they wouldn't be back until she apologized." He spun from the window as if he realized what he might have been implying. "But don't read anything into that, Hoke. It was simply a family quarrel. Scott's a fine man."

"I'm sure he is. I'll call in a stenographer. Make a statement and sign it—unless you'd rather call your attorney for advice first."

"I have nothing to hide."

"Fine. When you're finished, you'll find Julie and Scott waiting."

Harwood glanced at him. "This may seem like a strange time to ask, Hoke—but what happened between you and Julie?"

"Just one of those things. Something came along that I had to take care of—something was always coming along that I had to take care of. I guess I broke one too many dates. We both agreed she needed someone who had fewer demands on his time."

"I'm sorry. I always liked you, Hoke."

"Julie's better off this way."

Harwood shrugged. "I've never been entirely sure of that."

Early the next morning Beckett went directly to the small police lab in the far corner of the Municipal Building basement.

Nicholson, tall and thin and long-haired, put aside the morning newspaper. "I see you have another one, Hoke. Anything I can do?"

"Get your equipment out to that house and go over the living room. You should find nothing disturbed. When you get back, see what you can make of this." Beckett handed him the envelope with the small piece of fuzz he had taken from the rose thorn.

"Am I looking for anything special at the house?"

"Anything that doesn't seem to belong there. Get back to me as soon as you can. I'd like your report at the same time as the preliminary autopsy."

He took the elevator to Captain Tolley's third-floor office.

Tolley pushed aside a report and ran a hand through his close-cropped hair. "I've been expecting you, Hoke. Has anything developed on the Harwood thing?"

"Nothing yet."

Tolley leaned back and folded his hands over his stomach, his hard face impassive. "You're not going to like this, but I think we ought to let Spocker handle it. Your relationship with Julie Harwood was no secret around here, and I know you always liked the professor. If he killed his wife—and it looks as though he did—I don't want to place you in an embarrassing position."

"Let me worry about that. What makes you think the professor did it?"

"Come on, Hoke. If Newcombe had arrived two minutes sooner he'd have walked in on it. Melrose saw them struggling and called immediately, but she was dead when Newcombe got there."

"You're assuming she was struggling with the professor."

"Who else?" Tolley pushed a paper across the desk. "Read it for yourself. It looks clearer in black and white. There was only a gap of three minutes between the time Melrose called and the time Newcombe got there. Three minutes, Hoke. What can happen in three minutes?"

"I'm sure any competent defense attorney could make you a list," said Beckett dryly. "Do you want to find out in court how many items a good one can come up with, or should we plug up that little loophole before we turn the case over to the County Attorney? Let's just keep putting it together until we see what we have. And, as far as Spocker is concerned, I have his whole morning mapped out so if you want to turn the case over to him, you'll have to wait until this afternoon."

Tolley shrugged. "I was only trying to do you a favor, Hoke."

"I know." Beckett turned at the door. "Funny. That's what Julie said three years ago."

He motioned Spocker into his office as he walked through the squad room. "We'll need a rundown on Scott Pierce, including where he was last night. Did you find out anything from the neighbors?"

"Nothing."

"Then send Foster out there again. This time, see how much they know about how Mrs. Harwood spent her day. And, while he's at it, see what he can pick up about Melrose."

After Spocker left, Beckett picked up his phone and dialed. When the voice answered, he asked, "What time does the ten-fifteen train from the city arrive at the Meridian station?"

He jotted down the time—10:43—then drove to the station, a ram-

shackle building fronted by a small parking lot. He stood on the platform for a moment, noted the time on his watch carefully, and stepped back out through the parking lot briskly. Almost exactly ten minutes later he turned into the walk of the Harwood house. He checked the time again and retraced his route. The second trip was only a few seconds off.

Back in his office, Beckett drew a pad of paper toward him and jotted down:

10:43—train arrives at station
10:53—professor reaches house
11:00—Melrose sees struggle
11:02—call from Melrose
11:05—Newcombe arrives

He sat and studied the numbers. Does a man walk into his house and immediately strangle his wife? Possibly, if he's worked himself into a rage before he got there. Beckett doubted if Harwood had ever worked himself into a rage in his life.

Still, how else did it fit together? He would have arrived home at 10:53, and Melrose had seen struggling figures some time about eleven, which meant the professor was in the house. So, if *he* hadn't done it, he had been there when someone else did. Beckett couldn't see the man standing by while someone strangled his wife. There was something wrong.

Something Melrose had said came back to him, and he smiled and reached for the phone again. When he hung up he changed the figures on his list.

10:52—train arrived at station—nine minutes late
11:00—Melrose sees struggle
11:02—professor arrives at house as Melrose places call
11:05—Newcombe arrives

Melrose had said he hadn't seen the professor because he had been late taking the dog for his walk, assuming the professor had been on time. But because the train had been delayed last night, the professor would have entered the house while Melrose had been on the phone. That was why Melrose hadn't seen him.

Harwood couldn't have killed his wife. At eleven, when Melrose had seen the shadows on the blind, he was still two minutes from home. So whoever had been in the house had had those two minutes to get out before he arrived. And, assuming the killer had not, he'd had three more minutes before Newcombe rang the bell.

Beckett tapped at the paper with his pencil. What in hell had happened in that house?

Had the professor walked in on the killer, or had the killer moved just fast enough so that no one saw him leave?

The only thing that was sure was that it hadn't happened the way it appeared.

At five o'clock the men began to drift into his office. Spocker was first with the medical report in one hand, his notebook in the other. He placed the report before Beckett. "Preliminary only, but the cause of death was strangulation."

Foster was second, the man who had been checking the neighbors. Then came Nicholson, disheveled as ever, but with a gleam in his eye. Then Tolley, who stood against the wall and folded his arms.

"Go ahead, Spocker," said Beckett.

Spocker cleared his throat and opened his notebook. "Pierce comes from New England. Graduated from MIT, worked for a year for a manufacturing concern, then came here about four years ago. He had a little money inherited from his father and opened a specialty machine-tool shop. He's not getting rich but he's holding his own. Has four employees. We talked to a couple of them. They like working for him but say he has a tendency to fly off the handle when things go wrong. He stayed late at the shop last night, but the shop is in an industrial mall and the security guard says he left about ten. All in all, he sounds like a typical small-businessman fighting to survive."

"But he does have a bad temper?"

"So they say."

Beckett turned to Foster.

"I talked to the neighbors," said Foster. "Mrs. Harwood was well known, one of those people who believes in being neighborly and getting involved. Hard to get them to say anything against her now that she's dead, but they did leave the impression they really didn't like her very much. A little too overbearing, insisting on her own way—that sort of

thing. I asked them what they knew about the daughter and her husband and did turn up one interesting thing. The husband was at the house last night. The woman who told me said Pierce drives a red Eldorado—when that car's on the street, she knows he's at the Harwood house." He flipped the pages of his notebook. "She saw the car at ten-thirty but she has no idea when it left. The next time she saw it was when the daughter and Pierce arrived after the killing was discovered. The daughter wasn't at the house with Pierce, because a neighbor at the apartment house where they live saw her there at ten forty-five."

Beckett nodded. "Sounds as though he went from his shop to the Harwood house. If so, when did he leave and why didn't he see fit to tell us he'd seen Mrs. Harwood before she had been killed? As far as I know, he said nothing to anyone last night."

"That's true," said Spocker. "And he had plenty of opportunity. I talked with both him and Julie while they were waiting for the professor."

"What kind of slacks was he wearing?" asked Nicholson.

"A light-grey suit," said Beckett.

Nicholson's smile was triumphant. "That little piece of fuzz you gave me was light-grey wool."

"Where did it come from?" asked Tolley.

"A rose thorn in the back yard," said Beckett. His eyes met Nicholson's.

"What did you find in the living room?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary except dog hairs. Do they have a dog?"

"No," said Beckett.

"One thing I forgot to mention," said Foster. "Melrose, the guy next door, was friendly with the Harwoods. The hairs could be from his dog."

"What did you find out about Melrose?"

"Ordinary guy. The neighbors think a lot of him. He retired early from a job on the railroad. His wife is away, visiting relatives in Chicago."

Tolley pushed himself away from the wall. "You've been listening, Hoke, but you haven't been saying anything. I know you too well to think you sat in here all day looking out the window."

"All right," said Beckett. "The professor is in the clear." He told them about the late train. "When the professor walked into that house she was already dead. Now, he either saw the man or he just missed him. But if he saw him, why didn't he say so?"

"That's obvious," said Tolley. "No matter how you slice it, it comes up Pierce. He was at the house and we know he and his mother-in-law didn't

get along. He's the only one the professor would protect—for his daughter's sake—and he could have left by the back door before Reilly got there."

He motioned the others out of the room and faced Beckett. "Now you know what I was driving at this morning. Do you still want to stay with this? Do you want to bring Julie's husband in? Because it sure as hell looks as though you'll be doing just that. Now that the case has acquired some focus, it shouldn't be too difficult to put together enough to take it to the County Attorney. I leave it to you. Julie's going to be hurt, and deeply. Can you do that, Hoke?"

Beckett studied the window. Three years was a long time, but not long enough. If she had to be hurt, he wanted no part of it. "No," he said.

"You have vacation time coming," Tolley said. "Take the rest of the week off. We should have it settled by then."

The headline was in the morning paper two days later. The photo showed Pierce being led from the county courthouse shackled to Spocker, a wide-eyed Julie in the background. Beckett stared at the picture for a long time. It shouldn't have happened, he thought. Not to her.

He was pouring a second cup of coffee when the doorbell rang. Holding the cup in one hand, he answered it to find a shadow-eyed Julie standing there. "They told me you were on vacation," she said.

"I took a few days off. Come in." He held up his cup. "Would you like some coffee?"

She shook her head. "You backed away from it, didn't you, Hoke?"

He nodded. "I think you know why."

"I want you to be in on it."

"There's nothing I can do now. It's in the hands of the County Attorney."

"You left too soon, Hoke. He's innocent."

"A jury will decide that."

"It shouldn't go that far. He didn't go into the house; Hoke. He intended to talk to her but he changed his mind. He sat in the car for a few minutes, then left."

"He was in the back yard."

She stared at him. "How do you know that?"

"I can't tell you."

"He *was* in the back yard—several nights ago, we both were. She'd

said some nasty things on the phone, and Scott and I went out there to calm her down."

"Was he wearing that light-grey suit?"

"I think so."

Beckett sipped at his coffee. "What makes you think I can clear him?"

"If anyone can, you can."

"I may lock him up even tighter. Are you willing to risk that?"

"I'll risk it, Hoke. Talk to him."

"Why? All he'll tell me is that he's innocent. If he is, the answer isn't with him or he'd have cleared himself by now." He took her arm and led her to the door. "Go home. Let me think about it."

From the apartment window, he watched her get into her car and drive away, then he poured himself another cup of coffee. He sat at his kitchen table, his hands wrapped around the cup, waiting for it to cool, letting his mind run over what he knew. Then he poured the coffee into the sink and reached for the phone.

When Tolley answered, he said, "I have a question for you. Did the professor deny seeing Pierce there when he entered the house?"

"He swears the house was empty, and I believe him. I think Pierce heard him at the door and left through the back yard, circled the block, picked up his car, and drove off just as our men arrived. Why?"

"Just trying to get something straight in my mind."

"I thought we agreed it was best for you to stay out of it."

"That was before I realized I can't."

He found Nicholson in the basement lab. "That little tuft of wool. Is there any way to determine how long it'd been there?"

"None I know of, Hoke. It wouldn't deteriorate or anything. The only thing that could have happened to it, exposed to the elements like that, would be to get water-soaked during a rain. But it hasn't rained in two weeks. So that doesn't mean anything, does it?"

"Maybe it does," said Beckett.

The schedule he'd made out was still on his desk in his office. He went there and studied it. Spocker poked his head through the doorway. "What are you doing here?"

"Thinking about an old comedy I saw on television recently. It was one of those bedroom farces where everyone keeps running in and out of rooms and just misses seeing each other."

"I don't think your vacation has done you any good."

"You're wrong. I once told you to be very careful of any case where everything hinges on a major factor that's unprovable." He handed him the list. "What do you see?"

Spocker studied the paper, glancing up at Beckett several times and frowning before his face brightened. "Damned if you're not right, Hoke. I think we'd better bring him in and have a talk."

"I think you're right," said Beckett.

At midafternoon Julie appeared in the doorway of Beckett's office, hesitating as if she felt she wouldn't be welcome.

Beckett smiled. "Come in."

"I wanted to thank you, Hoke. They said it'll take about an hour to get Scott released."

"It's a great deal easier to get into this place than it is to get out."

"Only this morning you said there was nothing you could do, but—"

"When I told you that, it was true. But, to be honest, I was never very comfortable about the way things developed. I thought I was being influenced by the fact that you were involved so it would be better if I left it in the hands of people who could be more objective. It wasn't until after you left that I realized you had nothing to do with the way I felt—I simply wasn't convinced Scott was guilty. The whole thing was too precisely timed to be pulled off without a rehearsal and there certainly hadn't been one. I just couldn't see the sequence of events. Shadows on the blind at eleven, your father home two minutes later, the call to the police at the same time, the officers arriving in just three more minutes, Scott making his escape in the middle of all of this without being seen or heard by anyone. Something had to be wrong. After I came here this morning I realized what it was."

There were tears in her eyes. "I can understand her having an affair. It seemed like she and Dad—" She shook her head. "I don't think she ever forgave him because he never became a dean or president of the university. But I can't understand how it could end like that."

"She broke it off that night, but you know how she was. She couldn't do it gently or compassionately. She made fun of him, laughed at him and insulted him, and he lost his head."

She shook her head slowly. "I suppose I should hate him. But all I feel is pity. How did you know?"

"We'd been working on the supposition that your mother had been killed at eleven because Melrose said he'd seen shadows on the blind, but that was the one factor that couldn't be proved. Suppose he'd lied? That would knock out that whole crazy timetable and everything would make sense.

"Melrose broke down when we questioned him. He killed her at about ten-thirty, while Scott was parked outside debating whether he should try to talk to her. If he had, he might have walked into the middle of it, but he didn't. Afterward, Melrose had some vague notion that he could hang it on your father. He took his dog for a walk to think things over. When he returned, he thought your father had already arrived home, since he had no idea the train was late. He called us with that story about seeing a struggle. While he was on the phone your father came home. He was in the clear, of course, because he wouldn't have had time to do anything. But then, luckily for Melrose, Scott entered the picture. Whether Scott would have been convicted I don't know, but it was possible."

"I don't know how any of us can ever thank you, Hoke."

"For doing what the county pays me to do? Forget it."

She paused at the door. "At least you'll drop by and see us?"

The sun streaming through the window burnished her coppery hair, and Beckett realized that three years wasn't a very long time at all.

"Sure," he lied. "I'll do that."



Old tricks are all right as long as people keep forgetting them

AN HONEST LIVING

by **JEFFERY
SCOTT**



Tough Terry had it all, in his own estimation. Well, all but money—and he and **Silly Billy** were about to take care of that.

A skeptical, very real wind leaped out of ambush behind a bend in Cap-a-Pie Lane, City of London, and made him shiver. It also made him think, a process refreshing in its novelty; Terry wasn't nuclear, but he tended to be a reactor rather than a worker-out.

Silly Billy—damn his eyes—was late again. Luckily he was too dim to

chicken out, but this was irritating. Terry had a knitted cap that rolled down into a ski mask and a digital watch with a stop-watch function that he'd shoplifted especially. He didn't know quite how it worked, but it struck him as professional. Tabloid reports of major crimes, which he read slowly yet avidly, lips moving all the while, often referred to "stop-watch planning."

Terry smirked at the circumstance of having Silly Billy, Ron Williams, as his partner. Silly Billy, through his mother, Ada Williams, was a scion of a London family which had been bent since at least the seventeenth century. Name it—from picking pockets at public hangings to some of the earliest train robberies—and they had done it.

Whereas Terry, son of a tax inspector and latest in a long line of blameless, petty civil servants, had no criminal connections at all.

Funny . . .

Of course Silly Billy's connections to big-league villainy were remote. Ada's first husband had been killed in action in 1944—nothing to do with the Second World War, just a black-market disagreement—and Silly Billy was her son by husband number two, now also dead, an idle and unsatisfactory but relatively honest man:

Terry lit a cigarette, running on the spot for a while before slumping back against the nearest rigid object. Suddenly he levered himself away from the bus stop and pushed the cap to the back of his bullet head. The basic tone of his cockney voice was angry, but a little awe was there as well. "I don't believe it!"

Mrs. Williams, shaped almost like a cube in her sad black coat, marched toward him. "Now don't you start, young Terry! Your mother and me was at school together. What have you been doing with my little boy?"

Terry quailed. "Nuffin'! Billy and me, we just like long walks at night."

Ada Williams closed her eyes and quivered. "When you lie, make it good—or original, leastways. I know you're a villain and you're trying to make him one. I'm talking about trying for six months and not making more than a couple of hundred quid between you."

Billy, peeping around his mother, smiled haggardly. "Sorry, mate. She locked me in till I agreed. That's why I'm late."

Terry said tautly, "Agreed to what, you pitiful little berk?" But he knew.

"I'm coming with you," Mrs. Williams announced. She hefted the pair of bulging black shopping bags which were as much a part of her costume

as the coat and the glazed black straw hat vaguely suggesting a Nazi helmet.

Terry wiped a hand down his face with enough force to leave fleeting white streaks. He was hardly nineteen, but looked older for an instant. "Out of the question, Mrs. W." He'd remembered that from telly. It had a commanding ring.

"Who's asking you?" She walked past him, Billy towed behind her by an invisible chain. "I'm coming."

Terry trotted after them. "Have a heart, Mrs. W. I could never hold me head up again. Burglars don't take their mums along."

"More fools them, then. Dog and Geranium's where I'm going. I'm buying, so you'll come. We'll talk."

They had the back bar of the pub to themselves, as Ada Williams had calculated. She skimmed a five-pound note across the table. "We'll discuss this like sensible human beings. There's only one of *them* present, but I like pretending-games. Get the drinks, Terry."

Two pints and a double gin later, Terry wound up, "I've been planning this for weeks, Mrs. W. No offense, but you'll nauseate the whole caper if you come with us." An effective lie popped into his head. "Anyway, it's a climbing job, over the slates, a touch of the tiles."

"Planning for weeks! Wandering about hoping somebody left a door unlocked, more like. As for climbing, my Ron's not doing that; he's got no head for heights."

Terry swallowed a curse and tried the dignified touch. "*I have* got a place in mind, s'matter of fact. Front and back doors are solid; it used to be a furrier's, so the doors are metal-sheathed and that. So we've got to go down through the slates. It's the roof or nothing."

There was such a place, and Silly Billy had told him of it. But Terry had filed it away for later; probably never-style later. "Roof or nothing," he repeated conclusively.

Mrs. Williams disposed of the gin like so much water, unwinkingly. "Unless you've got the key, love." A brassy slip of metal gleamed between her fingers.

Terry gave Silly Billy a murderous look. "You told her!"

Billy reddened and mumbled sulkily, "Well, she told me in the first place, didn't she? We only got to know because she's the cleaner there. She told me, then I told you. About all that money around the place."

His mother laughed pityingly. "Oh, yes, I told you about it. Pity you don't listen so good, Ronnie. It's only there during business hours when the shop is open. They bank it every afternoon. D'you think they're daft, like you two?"

Tough Terry wondered what it would feel like to kill her. Splendid, or merely highly satisfying? Then he frowned. "Hang about—if there's nothing there, why d'you want to come along?"

Ada Williams applauded softly. "That's more like it. Does your head hurt, son? Must be right taken aback by all the unusual activity up there."

Unable to decide whether he was being flattered or insulted, Terry lit another cigarette, not quite daring to blow smoke at her. She coughed pointedly in any case.

"The place you're thinking of, the dry-cleaning shop where I do the sweeping and scrubbing, is one of three in a little terrace off The Lane, right? Built about a hundred and thirty years ago—did you know that?"

Billy was frankly bored, printing circles on the table with the wet base of his tankard. Terry tilted his chair back on two legs. They were all the same, adults—forever droning away about useless things.

"Pin your ears back, Accident Face," she commanded. "You'll learn something to your advantage, as the old lawyers say. Victorian terrace of houses, now shops or offices. Builders in those days wanted to save money, make one lot of bricks do twice the work. No central heating nor electric fires in those days neither. All open grates for coal. Think about it."

Mrs. Williams waited expectantly. Tough Terry might have been a codfish on a fishmonger's marble slab, only less animated.

"Give me patience. Dry-cleaner's place, pretty secure. Next door a moving company, Peerless Haulage, *very* secure. Now picture a fireplace in the dry cleaner's backed up against one in Peerless Haulage. Two fires, only one chimney. So what we've got between the easy place and the hard place isn't just fireplaces but—" She didn't have to wait more than twenty seconds.

"A—a way through! Like a doorway!"

"Shout up, dear. They didn't quite catch that down the far end of Cap-a-Pie Lane."

Terry gazed at her worshipfully. "Sorry. That's bloody brilliant, Mrs. W."

"Leave off, son. They've been using that fireplace dodge since London was a village." But Mrs. Williams was flattered, expansive. "Old tricks

are all right as long as people keep forgetting them. And I think Peerless Haulage just may have."

She rapped her knuckles on the table, elbowing Silly Billy in the ribs in the same motion. "Come on, time to be earning an honest living."

Even though she had the key to the dry cleaner's, it wasn't the easiest of preludes. They had to slip in fast, between bouts of passing traffic, and were unable to use lights in the outer room nearest the street.

Terry managed to bump into Mrs. Williams. She clutched at Silly Billy, who swayed off balance, flailed, and knocked something off the wall. There was a huge clatter.

Mrs. Williams and Terry became statues for a long half minute. "The first-aid box," Silly Billy moaned from somewhere at their feet.

"Shut up, you damned little crybaby," his mother consoled him. "First-aid box? You can't be that badly hurt."

"It fell on my foot, Mum."

Eventually they fumbled into the back room, stuffy with chemical odors. Mrs. Williams drew the curtain across the gap between the public area and the cleaning machinery while Terry deployed the torch.

His lower lip pushed out, his squint, under stress, intensified. "I can't see no fireplace!"

Mrs. Williams sighed heavily. "I daresay that's because of the hardboard, love. The sheet of hardboard they nailed over it to stop the drafts. Right under your nose, between those two machines."

She put one of her trademark shopping bags on the floor. It clinked. "Hammer, chisel, jemmies. Work quietly. Lever the hardboard away. You'll find an old wood chisel in the bag.

"Then you knock *one* brick out." She clicked her tongue. "As you were—you'll find the grate has a cast-iron fireback, but that lifts out.

"*Then* you knock one brick out. Wait for a bus to be passing to cover the noise. Pry the rest free. It'll be easy because the mortar's old and the heat perishes it over the years anyway."

She shoved Silly Billy into position alongside Terry. "You, take the bricks as Mastermind here loosens them. Don't sling them down, treat them like eggs. Apart from that first one you ought to be able to hear yourselves thinking all the while. Well—second thoughts—hear yourselves breathe."

Her voice was receding. Tough Terry spun around. "Missus! Where you off to?"

"The pub—where else?" She sounded surprised. "Think I'm standing around half the night with my bunions and my varicose veins? I'll be back when the pub chucks out. You should have it ready by then. Good big hole, mind; I'll have to get through."

Her forecast was correct, and at 11:07 P.M. Mrs. Ada Williams passed from Weeduzitkwik Cleaners to Peerless Haulage with rather less trouble than a camel negotiating the needle's eye.

Peerless Haulage was easier to move around in, since its windows on the street were painted dark green. It turned out to be a mystifying warren of partitioned-off cubes extending two floors.

The firm, judging from the quantities of dust and discarded cigarette packets and beer cans, wasn't doing well. And it seemed to be as much a store as a transport company. Old fruit machines crammed one partitioned area, flat circular drums of film another.

Terry grew more agitated with every discovery. His hands were blistered and bleeding and his eyes felt raw from the dust and soot they had endured. "It's half bloody derelict, this gaff!" he complained. "Where's the money?"

His torch beam encountered something that gleamed and squatted. He cursed savagely. "A bloody *safe*. I can't handle safes! Come on, Ma, you know all the answers. Got some gelignite hidden in your knickers, have you?"

"Manners!" Mrs. Williams was outraged. "Hold the torch steady. There's a thing. Combination lock; fireproof, triple skin, rolling bolts." She ought not to have sounded so nonplussed. She had watched the safe delivered less than a week earlier while sweeping and dusting the dry cleaner's.

Tough Terry ground his teeth. "All that flaming work for nothing!" He touched the safe. "Funny, though—this thing must have cost a bomb and it's been put here, in a ruddy slum."

"Well, it's beyond us," said Mrs. Williams. "Look for a desk, Terry. I doubt whether they keep the cash float in the safe."

Five minutes later Terry padded downstairs, mollified. "Right again, Mrs. W." He flourished a sheaf of notes. "Nice tickle—three hundred quid in a big cashbox. Split half and half?"

Mrs. Williams shook her head calmly. "Sixty-four, son, and think yourself lucky. You'd never have got in without my know-how."

"Fair enough," he conceded. Mrs. Williams watched impassively as he made the split. She and her son were being cheated, for there had been the best part of six hundred pounds in the cashbox. She'd slipped it in there while they were exploring.

They parted as midnight floated down from St. Denis Great behind Cap-a-Pie Lane. "I'm going straight home," said Mrs. Williams, "and you'd better do the same, young Terry. And listen—don't go wild spending that cash."

He grinned at her. "Think I'm stupid?" And he jog-trotted away.

"Not exactly stupid, more a half-wide mug," she murmured.

Silly Billy chuckled agreement. Somehow he looked less vacant now that they were alone. "Not much time, Mum, if he does what I think he'll do."

They hurried back to the dry cleaner's and were examining the Peerless Haulage safe within ten minutes.

"We could have got in on our own, Mum. We didn't need that loud-mouth."

Mrs. Williams patted his arm. "No knowing how tough those bricks might be. There could have been two layers of them, or the firebacks might have got rusted in or warped or something. Anyway, he's still got his part to play, bless him."

She didn't sound benevolent.

Billy scratched his head. "Looks a good safe, Mum."

"It is. Gord Tenney doesn't use rubbish." Gordon Tenney owned a chain of sauna-and-massage cribs in Soho, some blue cinemas, several clubs and clip joints, and he had the gang to keep them running smoothly. He was, to be restrained about it, not at all a nice man, and a decidedly dangerous one into the bargain.

Mrs. Williams brooded over the dial of the combination lock. "Know something about Gordon Tenney, son? He's right absent-minded—forget his head if it wasn't screwed on. And this is a new safe. What does that tell us?"

Billy got her drift. "He'd never write it down! The combination?"

She chortled to herself. "You'd be surprised how many do—and leave the number in the same room as the safe. Arnie, my old man before your

dad, once broke into a place and the safe key was in a glass box on the wall."

Her son smiled politely, but he was restless. "No glass box, Mum."

"No, but Gord Tenney's birthday is—" She put on her glasses and checked the scrawled figures on the back of an envelope. Mrs. Williams had invested in a facsimile of Gordon Richard Tenney's birth certificate, as any citizen had a perfect right to do. "Eighteenth May, 1939."

Silly Billy said thoughtfully, "Eighteen-five-nineteen-thirty-nine." He studied the dial. "We need another two digits for this make of safe."

"That's simple—thirteen's always been Gord's lucky number. Remember the fuss he made when they wouldn't let him call his racehorse 'Thirteen'?"

She passed him a slip of paper. "There are some possibilities, son. I worked them out in bed last night. The combination probably starts or finishes with thirteen. Starts, most like—he's sappy about that number. Maybe he's been tricky and put three left or right turns in a row, but most people choose left, right, left, same as marching."

Silly Billy worked the dial while she held the torch. He tugged the handle after each try. On the ninth or tenth attempt the door swung open, dumping him on his backside.

Even before he picked himself up, Billy was badly frightened. Even Mrs. Williams was paler than usual. "Too much, Mum," said Billy, his tone urgent and warning.

"Must be half a million," she agreed. The upper shelves of the safe were so tightly packed with banknotes that they presented solid white oblongs.

Mrs. Williams grabbed her son's wrist, not for reassurance but to check the time. Their eyes met. "We've got an hour, maybe," she said.

Billy was stubborn. "Too much," he repeated. "Take this lot and he'll kill us. Too much, Mum. Enough for him to spend the rest of his life chasing us. The rest of *our* lives."

Composure restored, she smiled crookedly. "Gord Tenney's retirement fund," she commented dryly. "He always was a hoarder, even at school. I was doing school dinners in them days. I got his measure." She straightened a little. "Fetch my other bag, love."

"I don't like it, Mum."

"You will before the night's out. Fetch the bag."

By the time he got back, the safe was empty, its bricks of ten- and

twenty-pound notes, some still secured by bank wrappers, set neatly on the floor. "Look at that," she muttered, her forefinger tapping a wrapper. A clerk had scribbled a date there, in 1977.

She drew a bulky, sharp-edged brown-paper parcel from the shopping bag, borrowing Billy's pocket knife to slit the string.

Billy started, his jaw dropping at the sight of the contents. "Where the hell did you get that?"

Mrs. Williams smiled again. "Funny money from your cousin Archie, Middlesborough way. Good stuff but he's too windy to try passing it. Can't blame him; that's always the dodgy bit. Being family, I've got this for three days—sale or return."

She started putting one or two packets of counterfeit banknotes into each of the blocks from the safe, stacking the genuine money to one side. Getting the idea, Billy set to work as well.

After twenty-five minutes they had finished, and Mrs. Williams supervised the replacement of the hoard. "Put the duff ones right at the back of the shelf," she ordered. "It could be years before he works down to them."

Soon the compressed, unflawed ends of the banknotes once again presented those white oblongs. Billy swung the door shut, set the dial to the position he had mentally noted before moving it, and wiped handle, dial, and door with a rag from the shopping bag.

"How much have we got?" he asked as they were about to slip out through the dry-cleaning shop.

"The best part of 120,000 pounds once we've paid Archie," his mother said, then gasped and jumped back from the window. "Drat it—visitors!"

Nerves vibrating, she and Billy crouched behind the counter, listening to scratchings at the door. There was a splintering noise, a protesting curse, and a sudden rush of frosty air, followed by cautious footsteps.

Two figures moved to the inner room and bricks rattled faintly as the new intruders scrambled through to the next-door building.

Ada Williams hurried to the street door, pausing only to jerk her chin at the splintered woodwork around the lock.

"Bodgers' work," she said. "I thought your mate Terry wouldn't be able to keep away from that safe. Just a matter of how long it took for him to think straight and stop being greedy—rope a safe merchant in for a cut of the profits."

They walked on—tired mother, supportive son carrying her bags. Ob-

viously trailing home after a family visit on the far side of the city.

"But if they had all that trouble with a shop door I don't think they'll manage the safe," Ada mused aloud. "Now then, Terry double-crossed us, right? Twice over—not splitting fair, and then trying to do the safe on his own."

Billy wagged his head and rolled his eyes, affectionately exasperated. "We did the safe on our own."

"We're family. That makes it different. It's only natural. D'you reckon if Terry was to be caught he'd split on us?"

"I doubt it," said Billy. "He'll have told his new partner that the job was all down to him, his own work. If he tells the law about you the word will soon get round—Terry wouldn't like people knowing he'd cheated a poor widow-woman and her boy, him what's not as bright as he might be." He grinned. "And if he changed his tale later, everyone would take it for granted he was lying, just trying to spread the blame."

"That's what I thought. It would be a mercy if he and his mate *did* get caught. It'd get me off the hook. They broke in where I work; no reason for the law to wonder about my key. And Gord Tenney will think a couple of toe-rags either couldn't bust his safe or got stopped in time. When he checks the money it'll still be there—after a fashion. When and if he does tumble, Gord will look for Tough Terry and the other bloke."

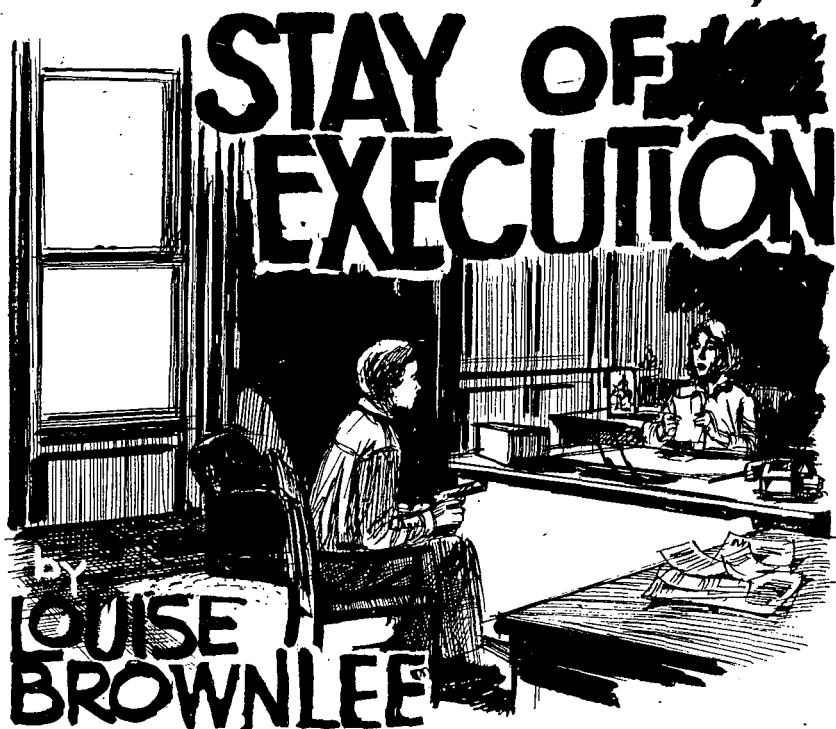
They walked on. "You know, my holidays start tomorrow," she remarked, apparently casually. "We can drive up the motorway and pay Archie, then go abroad. Salt a bit of the money away, spend a bit, have a laugh and a shout."

Silly Billy tested the weight of the shopping bag. A lot of laughing and shouting there, all right.

"But just to set my mind at rest, it would be nice if they caught Terry at it," Ada Williams said.

Her son had the coin out, ready. "Call it, heads or tails," he suggested resignedly. "Loser makes the anonymous call to the police."

Leo was tough and harsh, but he was always honest . . .



Tim Keegan had dreamed, during those two years in the Army overseas, of autumn in western Montana, of the biting wind, of the pale sunlight, and, above all, of the feel of the hunter's rifle against his shoulder.

He had been home for a couple of days. It was fall and Lolo Peak showed fresh snow. As he waited in the judge's chambers in the old courthouse, the wind blew through the window onto his sweating neck. Faint sunlight fell on the notes and clippings he had placed on the table

beside him. But there was no hunter's rifle. There was a cocked .45 revolver in Tim's right hand.

He was waiting to kill District Judge Loren Prentice.

The windows of chambers stood open and the morning sun streamed across the floor. Tim stared at the carpet by the door and wondered where Judge Prentice would fall. Would there be much blood? Could he escape before the typewriters in the clerk's office down the hall fell silent? Before someone came to investigate? Before all of western Montana turned out to track down the killer of one of its judges.

Killer? Executioner, more like. Tim glanced at his watch. Eight-thirty. He had sneaked into the quiet old courthouse with his brother's .45 under his jacket. Chambers were on the ground floor and he had passed no one in the corridor.

Now he had only to wait.

How could he be so nervous and still have a firm grip on the revolver? Some of his Army training must've stuck. It must have made a man of him in spite of all his brother Leo's despairings. Well, he'd show Leo.

Tim's left hand spread the clippings on the table. He glanced at the top one and felt his resolve harden.

JUDGE PRENTICE SENTENCES KEEGAN TO HANG. The date for execution was a week from today. His big brother would be dead then—in just a week.

Well, so would Judge Prentice.

Tim pushed the clippings and notes into two stacks. He had carried them with him constantly in Korea, reading them daily. A touch of home. But this morning they were bolsters to his courage. In the first pile were the scrawled notes from Leo, raving about unpunished criminals and lenient courts.

Because Leo didn't write to him after his arrest for murder, Granny Ender, a neighbor, had sent the second and smaller batch. It had been hard for her too, thought Tim. She couldn't write very well because of her arthritis and she'd had no schooling. But she had kept him informed. The last clipping she'd sent arrived two days before he shipped out of Korea for home. It quoted Judge Prentice:

"Leo Keegan, a jury of your peers has found you guilty of the deliberate and premeditated murder of Foster Blanchard. As a native Montanan you are versed in the history of the Vigilantes

of the 1860s. The services they performed in the territory at that time were necessary, but when their job was done they stepped aside and we have had law and order since then. You claim, in your own words, to be a vigilante. You claim to have done your duty. You are, Leo Keegan, a ruthless murderer. You have no respect or regard for the law. In the furtherance of justice it is the sentence of this court that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead . . .”

Tim could never read further than that. The idea of his brother dead—the judge saying he didn’t respect the law—Leo was tough and harsh, but he was always honest.

Last evening while sitting on the rotting porch of the Keegan cabin, Tim had decided to kill the judge. Leaves of the ancient high-bush cranberry trailing over the shack waved before his eyes like a red flag before a bull. Brushing the redness aside, Tim had driven to a bar and looked up Judge Prentice in the phone book.

But there was no listing. After pondering over a beer, he had phoned the Sheriff’s office—a burst of resourcefulness learned in the Army. A lie, Leo would have called it. Leo always said he could stand anything but a liar.

“This is the desk officer for the city,” Tim had said. “We have a warrant for Judge Prentice to sign, but there’s nobody at the house. Have you a new address for the judge?”

In a moment he had his answer. “No, same address. The Five-Six Ranch outside town on Highway 93.”

Within minutes Tim had parked on the shoulder of the highway, the big house of the Five-Six Ranch just ahead. Judge Prentice had been appointed to the bench since Tim had gone to the Army. Tim had never heard of him before Leo’s arrest. And the Five-Six Ranch had been vacant for years before the judge had moved in. Well, it’d soon be vacant again.

He waited. Then a pickup truck drove into the ranch yard. A tall man climbed out, took off his Stetson to reveal a thick shock of white hair, and disappeared into the house. “Your last night home, Judge,” Tim whispered. The guy seemed young for that white hair. But it would make it easy to spot him at the courthouse tomorrow. He glanced back only once, wondering if Judge Prentice had any kids. Tim’s mother had died when he was ten, leaving him in Leo’s care, and he’d never known his father..

That bothered him a little. A family ought to have a father.

But sitting in chambers now, rereading the clippings, the .45 in his hand, put that thought out of his mind for good.

Suddenly there was movement outside the door, a shadow on the clouded glass. He raised the .45 and waited, frowning. The man he had seen last night was tall. This shadow seemed smaller.

One of the girls from the damned clerk's office, he thought.

The door opened and Tim leveled the .45 at a young woman as she walked in. "Now, lady, you freeze right there," he said. "Close that door slow and shut up. That's right. Cross over there to the desk and sit down. I'm here to get Judge Prentice, so you be quiet and you'll be O.K."

She backed up to the chair behind the desk and sat down, a tall, slender woman, her dark hair in a short cut. She had wide grey eyes and a soft mouth that now formed an O of consternation. She was dressed in beige jeans and a shirt; in her hand she clutched a sheaf of papers.

"This isn't a court day," she said, her eyes on the gun.

"The morning paper said the public defender is asking for a stay of execution for Leo Keegan, and the judge'll be here to rule on it." He liked her eyes. They were kind of silver, but frightened. She wore a wide gold wedding band. "You work here? They let you dress like that?" He tried to sound gruff.

"These papers," she said, her eyes on the .45 in his right hand—the only steady thing about him, he thought.

"Put 'em on the desk," he said. "I don't want you throwing them at me when the judge walks in." His eyes darted from her to the door.

She leaned forward and set the papers on the judge's desk, sliding them across the desk blotter to a clock and radio console. As she sat back in the large chair it hit the table behind it. A small framed photograph fell to the floor.

"Pick it up," said Tim.

She did, returning it to the table. It was a picture of a horse with a child on its back.

"Tennessee Walker," said Tim. Damn, he wished she didn't look so scared. He wasn't going to hurt her. He glanced at the door again, then turned his chair so he'd have a good view of her and the door at the same time. He felt the autumn breeze sweep through the window behind him.

"You like horses?" he asked.

She nodded.

"My brother Leo had a sorrel once. Took a kick at our dog and that dog took a chunk out of the horse's rear quarter." His voice was high-pitched and rapid. Damn! Leo would laugh if he could hear. He swallowed. He could still see the big dog go for that horse—he'd been a fighter, that dog. But then, only fighters survived at the Keegan place.

Tim scowled at the memory. "Leo beat that dog to a bloody mess and threw him in a shed." He noticed her wince. "I snuck out that night and carried the dog to our neighbor, Granny Ender. She's the one sent me these clippings about what Judge Prentice did to Leo. She fixed the dog up and found him a home."

His voice trailed off. He looked at her and she looked back, her eyes reflecting his pain. "Wasn't right, my sneakin' the dog like that. Leo would've beat me. He didn't stand for lyin' or dishonesty. But I had to help the dog. Leo thought it crawled off to die."

She didn't answer. Tim looked at the .45 and again at the door. He rubbed his neck. The breeze felt good. He was bathed in sweat in spite of it. Funny telling her about the dog—about being dishonest with Leo. But Leo's idea of justice sometimes . . .

He glanced at his watch again. Eight-forty-two. Damn. The time was crawling.

"Who are you?" the young woman asked suddenly. "What's your name?"

Tim jerked nervously. God, he thought, I'm gettin' worse. "I told you. Leo Keegan's my brother. I'm Tim Keegan. I just got home from the Army, and my brother is going to die for doing justice to a killer. Leo talked about justice all the time—lenient courts and stuff."

"What if the judge doesn't come?" she asked. "Will you kill me? What about the girls down the hall?"

"Hell, no. What d'you take me for? I wouldn't hurt a woman. Prentice is havin' my brother killed next Monday, and I want Leo to know. I took care of it for him."

"You could get killed."

"I can get away. I won't hurt you. It's not your fault you came in here. I know the high country. If I get a good start they'll never catch me."

She sat rigid in the desk chair. "Wasn't your brother in trouble with the law before?"

"Oh, yeah. Leo and his friends got mad about some guy gettin' out of jail. They busted him up bad. They didn't like what the court had done."

Leo said the man oughta pay . . ." His voice trailed off. It sounded bad when he told about it but when Leo explained it it made sense.

"You didn't go along?"

"No, I didn't do those things. Leo said I was a—a—" He looked into her eyes. They were wide and frightened, but she was listening to him. He glanced at the door. "Leo thought I was a coward."

He knew she was looking at him hard, at his thin, almost delicate face. "No face for a man," Leo had often guffawed—raw-boned Leo, who looked like a horse with his long face and wide nostrils, his big torso. Like two colts from different studs, him and Leo—and there was probably some truth to that, knowing the Keegans. After Ma died Leo just let him grow up there, with the dogs and whatever else survived.

He glanced at his watch. It was almost ten to nine. He took a firmer grip on the revolver and eyed the door. His hand shook.

"Have you ever shot anyone?"

"No. But I been huntin', I know guns." There was silence and then he snorted. "Huntin'. Ha! I never *could* shoot a deer. Leo only took me twice—both times I froze up. Buck fever." He shrugged. "Leo always killed plenty, even when we didn't need it. I used to sneak venison out of the freezer for Granny Ender. Man, if Leo'd ever caught me sneakin' it out like that!"

"You're close to this Granny Ender?"

"She's a neighbor. Little old lady. I spent lots of time over there when I was a kid—kept her car goin', did things for her. I sent her money from Korea so she could hire kids to do the chores."

And she always used to say I'd turn out to be worth a hundred of Leo, he thought. Granny had no use for Leo.

"Granny's going to be sad about this," she said.

"Yeah. Damn, I wish that judge would get here. I drove by his place last night and got a look at him. Tall guy, white hair—you know."

"Why didn't you kill him then?" Suddenly there was something in her eyes he couldn't read. Fear? But that had been there all along. Or was there more than one kind of fear?

"Because I wanted him to die right here, where he sentenced Leo. Leo knew Blanchard would get away with murder. He wrote, 'This guy is a big shot. They'll let him go.' And, sure enough, this last clipping Leo sent me before he killed Blanchard says the second day into the trial Judge Prentice called a mistrial on a technicality and set Blanchard loose."

Why am I talking so much? he wondered. She listens and I want to tell her. God, I'm scared. He looked again at the door. Both his hands were shaking now.

He gripped the revolver tighter. "This clipping says the judge called a mistrial because of a Supreme Court decision. And Blanchard gets away with murder!" He snorted. "Leo always yelled about technicalities."

"May I see that clipping?"

"You be damn careful, lady," he said, handing it to her. "No fast moves."

She read it, looked at him for a long moment, then returned it. "You admire Leo's honesty," she said. "He beat you for lying or sneaking. And he was infuriated with criminals who benefited from points of law."

"Right."

"Why do you suppose that clipping is taped together?"

"Probably cut from two pages of the paper."

Dark with fear, but unwavering, her eyes held his. "Why don't you uncock the revolver, Tim? It could go off accidentally."

He glanced at the door. "O.K. But only because it scares you." It scared him too, he admitted to himself as he closed the hammer down as gently as his shaking hands allowed.

"Your brother is afraid of hanging," she said. "He's looking for any technical error in his trial that will help him. The mercy he hated in the law is at work for him now. The public defender is appealing his case, so even without a stay of execution Leo won't die on Monday."

But Tim's mind focused on what she had said earlier. "Why'd you ask about the taped clipping?"

"It was cut apart. Your brother sent you only the section he could use to justify murder. There *was* a mistrial, but Blanchard hadn't been set free. A new trial date had been set, but Blanchard didn't live to see it. He was out on bail when your brother gunned him down."

"But the technicality—"

"The judge read the witness list the night after the trial started." She leaned toward him, talking earnestly. "By an oversight, the deputy acting as bailiff was also one of the state's witnesses. There had been a similar case—Turner versus Louisiana. The trial had to start over. A witness cannot have close contact with the jury."

Tim stared at the altered clipping, sent to him by Leo before he picked up his shotgun and went off to do murder.

"Then Leo—Leo lied? He lied to me!" He looked at the clipping, so

carefully cut and taped to say what Leo had wanted said, to omit what Leo had wanted omitted.

"Several law officers believe Blanchard was innocent," she said. "They're still investigating his case."

"Why? He's dead. What difference does it make?"

"He had a family."

Tim turned away from her. He didn't want to hear this. It went against the decision he had made last night. The decision—like the high-bush cranberry—was twisted and red as blood, violent as the life that had been lived there. Leo's life. Leo lying to justify murder. They looked at each other. "Tim, you don't have to prove a thing to Leo," she said. Her eyes had a flinty look. "You aren't the same as Leo. You can't kill. You don't belong here like this and you know it."

Tim looked at her, slender and straight in the chair, authority in her bearing. Then he looked at the photo of the child on the horse. "Your kid?" he asked.

"Yes."

"The guy at the ranch with the white hair—your husband?"

"Yes." She didn't look frightened any more.

"You're Judge Loren Prentice?" She nodded.

"Oh, hell," said Tim. He set the .45 on the desk. "The only decent thing about Leo was the truth in him. But he even lied about his honesty."

She glanced beyond Tim to the window. "That's the right decision, Tim, because two minutes after I set the papers on the desk you were a dead man. I pushed a silent alarm in this console, and there's a deputy behind you."

Tim whirled as a big man stepped over the low sill into the room holding a .357. "Judge kept you talkin', boy, and you talked right. I couldn't get a shot at your gun because your back was to me—and a cocked .45 and a nervous kid makes things delicate. I'm glad you put it down."

Judge Prentice sat back in her chair—the chair that fit her very well, thought Tim. "You'll find the law fair," she said. "With you and Leo. My sentencing of him didn't come easy. Deciding a man's life never makes a soft pillow at night."

The big deputy took Tim's arm. "Lots of appeals ahead for Leo, son. He'll outlive the hangman. But you damn near didn't."

Aunt Sarah always kept her promises . . .

THE DEAR DEPARTED

by
ROBERT
LOPRESTI



“No, thank you,” I said firmly. “I know it sounds trite, but I’m too young to die.”

Uncle Wilbur grimaced, a sure sign that he thought someone was being slow-witted. He grimaces at me quite often.

“I didn’t say anything about dying, Roger.”

“You talked about my becoming a ghost. I know only one way to accomplish that.”

"Not *be* a ghost. Just *play* one—for an hour."

"You'd better explain yourself, Uncle."

We were walking on the grounds of the estate my uncle and aunt owned, and where I, their only living relative, lived in freeloading luxury. Uncle Wilbur, a senior citizen in offensively good health, was walking at his usual pace, too fast for me to enjoy the stroll.

He slowed down for a moment to get a look at me. "You've met my secretary, haven't you, Roger?"

"Annie? Yes, indeed." She was a year or two younger than I and extremely attractive. I had invited her on a skiing weekend last year, not long after her arrival. Her refusal had been so uncompromisingly flat that I had avoided her ever since.

"Annie has agreed to marry me."

"Really? That is good news." I meant it; it was good to know that she had rejected me not for personal reasons but because she was after bigger fish. Of course, she was thirty-plus years younger than Wilbur, but that wasn't the sort of thing a sensible man points out to his only source of income.

"But, Uncle, I just thought of something. How is Aunt Sarah taking the news?"

"Not well, Roger. She refuses to give me a divorce and promises to raise holy hell if I try to get one."

I nodded sadly. "And she always keeps her promises."

"That's why I've come to you for help."

I felt uneasy. I was very little help to anyone, and no one was more aware of this than my uncle. Hadn't I been welching off him since my parents passed away many years before?

"Of course I'll do anything I can to help, but I don't know what you have in mind. Aunt Sarah certainly pays no attention to my opinions."

He grimaced again. "Of course she doesn't. In most ways she's a very sensible woman." The path had taken us to a small hill, and he had to slow down again until I caught up.

"You know that she's not well, Roger."

"Yes, Uncle. The doctor said the last heart attack would have been fatal if she hadn't received prompt medical attention."

"The next attack will take place far from medical aid, Nephew. You and I will see to that."

I thought it over. "Not easy to do. She never leaves the estate any

more, and the house is always full of servants. Radcliffe especially." Radcliffe, the butler, fawned over my aunt like a starving lap dog.

"You forget that there's one day a year when she does leave the house alone—April seventh."

"Of course. Her annual visit to the family mausoleum. Is that where I play ghost?"

"To be precise, it's where you'll pretend to be your own dear departed Uncle Harold."

"How shall we do it? A white sheet and colored lights?"

"Halloween costumes won't fool her, my boy. No, you'll have to get behind the steel door of the burial crypt and start pounding on it. She'll think Harold is trying to break out and get her. I expect that will finish her off nicely."

I was no longer amused. "It sounds like it might finish me off too."

"Last year I had the vault cleaned and inspected for decay, remember? The gentlemen checked for water seepage, airtightness, and so on. Well, their report included an odd piece of information. There is enough air in the vault for one person to live for twelve hours, provided that he doesn't engage in strenuous exercise. You've never exercised in your life, so that's no problem. Besides, I'll let you out as soon as the old girl is dead. So what do you say?"

"I don't like the scheme very much, Uncle. How can I be sure you'll open the door? Perhaps you and Annie have decided to make a fresh start, with no unwanted relatives around."

Another grimace. "Leave a sealed confession with a lawyer, to be opened if you die or disappear. In the letter you'll explain that I put you up to it." He shrugged. "I don't want to kill you, Roger. Just my wife."

We came into sight of the mausoleum. The family tomb stood on a hill, spoiling one of the prettiest views on the whole estate. I looked at it and shuddered.

"One more thing, Uncle. How do I know you won't write me out of your will afterward?"

Wilbur nodded with a satisfied air, as if I had at long last offered an intelligent question. He pulled a sheaf of papers out of his jacket. "Show this to your lawyer. Once I sign it, it turns a third of my estate into a trust for you. On my death it becomes yours outright, without those pesky inheritance taxes."

"One-third," I said, a bit sadly.

"I suppose you expected more, but remember, there's Annie to consider now. She expects to inherit the bulk of my estate, of course."

"Aren't you afraid that after Aunt Sarah's death I might blackmail you for more?"

He laughed. "What would you do? Threaten to go to the police and confess to murder?"

"Oh," I said.

"Besides, Nephew, have you ever asked me for money and not gotten it?"

"Actually, no."

"It's not that my generosity is unlimited, but that your requests have always been relatively small. You see, Roger, you are a spendthrift and a wastrel, but you do not have expensive tastes. You have neither the need, the ambition, nor the energy to engage in blackmail."

I realized, rather sadly, that he was correct.

"So will you play ghost for me, Roger?"

"All right, Uncle," I said, and then began to laugh. It had just occurred to me that I had always thought that to get my hands on Wilbur's money I would have to bury him. Apparently the truth was the other way around.

A week later, the trust had been signed and both our lawyers had copies of it.

"I don't know why ghosts prefer places like this," I said.

"Be quiet and help me," said Wilbur. It was early evening on April seventh, the twenty-ninth anniversary of Uncle Harold's passing. We were in the outer, visitor's chamber of the mausoleum. I had been there only once since my father's death years before, and I had forgotten how ugly it was. The building was a monument to that tragic combination: money and bad taste.

The actual caskets were entombed behind the walls of the crypt, which was hidden by a narrow steel door. My uncle and I pried this open with some difficulty. He waved a hand politely. "Hop in, Roger." I did so, without enthusiasm.

This inner room was even less hospitable than the outer, but of course it was intended for the occupants, who wouldn't notice. The only fixtures were five plaques on the walls identifying the resting places of the deceased members of our family.

I sniffed at the musty atmosphere.

"You're sure there's twelve hours' worth of air in here?"

"Probably more. That twelve-hour estimate assumes that the room is airtight, which I doubt, considering the quality of workmanship nowadays. But that's unimportant, Roger. I'll come to let you out an hour after Sarah arrives."

"What if the shock doesn't kill her?"

"Then you'll have a hard time explaining why you played such a cruel joke on her. But at least you'll have a third of my fortune to ease your embarrassment."

The steel plate was back in position and his voice became muffled. "Turn your flashlight this way. I want to make sure no light shines through."

Finally Wilbur went back so that the servants would see him going to bed as his wife went out and I was left alone with my ancestors. Having nothing else to do, I turned my flashlight to the plaques.

The biggest belonged to my grandfather, the founder of our fortune. He had been a robber baron long after it ceased to be popular. Granddad had left a considerable bundle to the three sons delivered to him by his wife, an otherwise insignificant woman whose wall plaque, I noticed, was slightly tilted.

The sons were James, Wilbur, and Harold. Only Uncle Wilbur had followed in the money-making footsteps of his father. James proved to be a wastrel, marrying a showgirl, spending recklessly, and producing nothing of merit except one son as worthless as he had been. That son was, of course, myself.

James and my showgirl mother had left their plaques here early, but the youngest brother had arrived first. Uncle Harold asked a woman to marry him—not a showgirl, but a woman of good family. She turned him down to marry Wilbur, and Harold killed himself two days after the wedding.

Whenever life seems boring and predictable I restore my sense of wonder by simply recalling that a person once killed himself out of love for Aunt Sarah. It seems incredible that a woman could change so much in a mere twenty-nine years.

Every April seventh, the anniversary of Harold's death, she arrived at the mausoleum, late at night, dressed in black. To mourn, I've always wondered—or just to remember her lost youth?

The air in the crypt seemed to be getting thinner. I cursed my imagination. It was stuffy in there, that was all.

The outside door squeaked, marking my aunt's arrival. There were rustling noises as she sat on the marble bench. The visitor's chamber, I knew, was lit by one yellow bulb, giving the room a spooky appearance.

Speaking of spooky, it was time to get started. I had considered the possibility that Sarah might recognize my voice, but rejected it. She so rarely listened to anything I said she was unlikely to make the connection in these circumstances.

I leaned against the door and whispered, "Sarah . . ."

Silence.

"Sarah!"

The little chamber had a wonderful echo that gave my normally squeaky voice a ghostly resonance.

I called her name again, and at last she spoke, in a quavery voice. I could barely recognize. "Harold? Harold, is that you?"

I scraped my fingernails across the door. "Come to me, Sarah!"

The outside door jiggled as she tried to open it. She couldn't, of course; we had seen to that.

It was time for the grand finale. I pounded on the steel plate. "You did this to me—you killed me, Sarah!"

Her scream echoed mine, and ended with a thud. I called her name twice more and heard nothing.

After a long, long time, the front door groaned open. Was she going out or was someone coming in?

At last Uncle Wilbur's voice broke the tension. "Well done, Roger. She's passed away."

"Congratulations, Uncle," I said. "Now get me out of here so we can get back before Radcliffe becomes suspicious."

"Certainly. It'll take a moment, though. She fell against the crypt door. I'll have to drag her out of the way."

"Gently, Uncle. Don't leave any marks on her." I smiled at the wall plaques. One-third of the family fortune was mine. I couldn't spend that much in a lifetime, but I certainly intended to try.

Wilbur grunted as he began to drag the body of his late wife away from the door. She was a very heavy woman, which was another advantage Annie had over her.

The grunts suddenly took on a new and alarming tone.

"Uncle, are you all right?"

He was gasping for breath. "Just—just winded, Roger. I have to stop for a moment. I'll open the door as soon as I—I—"

"Uncle Wilbur?"

I heard a thud, strangely similar to the one Aunt Sarah had made.

"Uncle!" I cried. "Are you all right?"

No answer.

"You can't do this to me!"

Silence.

I leaned heavily against the door. "You always seemed so healthy," I told him. "Blast you! How could I know that you had a bad heart too?"

I was absolutely certain Uncle Wilbur had passed away and was lying peacefully next to the body of his first and only wife on the other side of a steel plate that couldn't be opened from the inside.

I started pounding on the door and screaming. The vault seemed to get smaller, so I closed my eyes, still screaming. Finally I had to sit down, exhausted and short of breath.

Breath?

There had to be plenty of air left. I'd only been in the vault about two hours. But when would someone come to rescue me?

When the three of us didn't appear for breakfast, that was when. Eight hours from now—just as my air would begin to give out.

Would Radcliffe, the faithful butler, think of the mausoleum first thing or only after many fruitless hours of searching the house? And when he arrived, would I be too weak to call to him?

Perhaps I'd be a missing person until the funeral was held. If so, the undertaker who opened the crypt was in for a rude surprise.

The batteries in my flashlight have gone dead, and it's very dark in here. I can't see my watch, so I don't know how much time has passed.

Occasionally I pound on the door and then have to stop to catch my breath. Which takes longer every time.

If I *am* rescued, I'll have a devil of a time explaining this to the police. A prison term doesn't scare me any more. From my point of view, twenty years in a bright, roomy prison cell looks delightful. Somehow I don't think I'm going to have the chance to enjoy it.

Doi's nephew had disappeared with one hundred thousand yen . . .

THE COURAGE OF AKIRA-KUN

by
**RON
BUTLER**



My friendship with Police Inspector Toshiko Ueki began with an imitation samurai sword. He was the man who arrested me for trying to carry it home.

It happened about two years after my company put me in charge of our computer hardware office in Okayama, a moderate-sized town in western Japan not far from Hiroshima.

I suppose I should have known better, but few foreigners ever learn

everything about Japanese customs or laws. I had purchased the sword at a specialty shop near my office and didn't understand exactly what the clerk was trying to explain to me. I found out later that anyone can buy a sword if he has the price—even the replicas are expensive—but that *nobody* totes one around without special permission from the police. Not even home from the store. Rigid weapons control is a big part of Japanese law enforcement.

The inspector apparently had responded to a call from the nervous clerk shortly after I left the shop on my way to the Tenmaya bus stop. He stopped his cruiser by the curb a few meters in front of me, got out, and stood in my path, a tall, somber-faced man with hard, dark eyes.

"May I see the permit for your sword, sir?" he asked without preliminaries, holding out his white-gloved hand.

"What permit? I didn't know I had to have one."

"Are you a tourist?"

"No. I live here."

"Then I must ask for your alien registration, sir."

All resident foreigners in Japan are supposed to carry the green booklet with photograph and fingerprint, but I was careless and never bothered with it. "I'm sorry, I forgot it."

"Ah, *so ka?*" Is that right? "I am sorry, but you will have to come with me, sir," he demanded sternly, opening the passenger door on his cruiser.

I had no choice. We crisscrossed through the heavy downtown traffic and drove to the Okayama Prefecture Building while I sat and worried about the consequences of my ignorance.

Once we were seated, the inspector took a large stack of forms from a desk drawer and started on the questions. Name—Sam Brent. Age—thirty-five. Address—Fukui section, Tsushima district. Length of proposed stay—indefinite. Passport number—I did remember that detail, oddly enough. Marital status—

Marital status hurt. I explained that my wife and son had been killed in a car accident just weeks before they were scheduled to join me in Japan.

"Ah, *gomenasai*," the inspector said. "I am sorry."

Sorry or not, he charged me with an infraction of the weapons law and I wound up paying a hefty fine. Before I left, he returned the sword, expertly wrapped, stamped the papers giving me permission to carry it, and advised me not to forget my alien registration again.

After I got home, I laid the sword in a corner and made my first drink.

When I learned that I was going to Japan, Jane had decided to wait until the school year was over before making the move with Justin. That gave me time to look for a suitable house, and I found it. It was a two-story, semi-western place with traditional pantile roof, three small rooms with tatami mats, a family room with hardwood floor, kitchen, bath, and John.

Cooking for myself was a bore. I stuck to a simple repertory—instant noodles in a styrofoam cup, spaghetti with sauce out of a can, bacon and eggs. When this became too tiresome even for me, I'd go to one of the small restaurants in the neighborhood.

My favorite was the Tsushima Tei, which translates roughly as the Tsushima Place. After a few stiff drinks in that lonely house I'd step down into the entranceway, slip my shoes on, close the sliding glass doors, and go over the bridge that crossed a modest stream running parallel to a main road. I would stroll past the dairy, a laundry, several rice paddies, and the stationer's shop, turning left at the first major intersection. From there it was a walk of no more than five minutes.

The Tsushima Tei was run by a man, his wife, and a younger, surly-looking man who helped with the cooking. I liked the atmosphere: large menus on the walls, eight tables with two chairs each, a counter with four stools, and the usual stack of magazines and newspapers for solitary diners. I was sitting at the counter one night shortly after the rainy season set in, eating a bowl of green noodles and sipping a beer, when I heard another customer enter and take a seat behind me. I recognized the inspector when I stood up to pay my bill.

"*Konbanwa*," I said. Good evening.

"Mr. Brent." He remembered my name. "Please sit down if you are not in a hurry."

"*Domo*." Thanks. Why not? I couldn't resent a man who did his job well, and I had no reason to hurry home. I ordered another beer and asked the inspector if he would join me.

"Thank you, no. I am driving." Sufficient explanation. Drunk driving is a very serious offense in Japan, even for a policeman.

He introduced himself—I hadn't known his name—and we made small talk. I learned that Inspector Ueki (way-key) lived near me, was forty-seven years old, had attended the University of Oregon for two years as

an exchange student, was married, and had two daughters, one with her own family and one still at home. In return I gave him a synopsis of my own life. It was still raining when we left and Ueki gave me a ride home, politely refusing my invitation to come in.

In the following weeks, we met often. Ueki usually got off duty late, which fit in with my own habits. By the time the rainy season fizzled out six weeks later, we were on fairly good terms. As we were both steady customers by now, the proprietor started sitting down with us during lulls in business. Doi-san was in his late fifties, with grey hair clipped short in what we used to call a burr. He told us that he had wanted to talk to me for a long time, but was shy. That figured. Except in the larger cities, the Japanese can be almost pathologically wary of *gaijin*, foreigners. Polite and even interested, but wary.

Summer had given way to pleasant days and chilly nights. By then we all knew a good bit about each other. Doi began to tell us of his worries about the younger man who worked in the kitchen. Akira, he told us, was his nephew, and he was turning out to be a troublemaker—disrespectful, resentful, and filled with the radical philosophy of the Dai Nippon (Great Japan) Party, which was pushing for the resurgence of Japan as a major military power. Among other things, that would call for scrapping the constitution which General MacArthur had drawn up—the one forever renouncing war.

I had passed this off as the generation gap, Japanese-style, and was surprised when Ueki came to my office a few days later, telling me that he had an unusual request and would not be offended if I refused. It turned out that Akira had disappeared, along with a hundred thousand yen—about four hundred dollars. Would I care to go with him to see Doi-san? “He has come to like you very much.”

I would, and let my staff know I would be in touch.

Ueki drove me back to headquarters, where he exchanged the cruiser for his personal car, a Honda. “Even if this becomes an official police matter,” he explained, “I do not wish to embarrass Doi-san at his place of business.”

Doi took us to the privacy of a small storeroom in the rear section of the kitchen when we arrived at the Tsushima Tei. He had no idea where Akira had gone. The money had been taken from their lodgings above the restaurant.

"Perhaps," Ueki suggested, "I can make a reasonable guess. Tomorrow there is to be another demonstration at Narita. The newspapers say that elements from the Dai Nippon Party will be there to give support."

Narita, the vast new international airport outside of Tokyo which had required so much precious farmland, had long been the focus for numerous violent protests involving tens of thousands of police and demonstrators—embittered farmers and radicals looking for a cause.

Doi pursed his lips, shaking his head in frustration. "*Damei, damei.*" No good, no good.

"But," Ueki continued, "I may be able to help in a minor way. I have some days of vacation coming and will travel to Narita. If the demonstration is as well organized as in the past, I may be able to find Akira's group and persuade him to return with the money. This will have to be unofficial, however. I have no jurisdiction in the Tokyo area, and with such large crowds I may never find him."

"Do you mind if I go?" I asked Ueki.

"There is some danger, you must know."

"I'd like to help Doi-san if I can."

"Agreed, then: I will call one of my friends on the Tokyo Police Force and make the arrangements."

Doi bowed deeply, expressing his thanks.

I met Ueki at the Okayama Station early in the morning. We purchased our tickets and rode the escalator to the platform for the 9:20 Shinkansen, the "Bullet Train" that would whisk us over much of the length of the island of Honshu.

The long, sleek train, gliding silently on electric power, arrived at precisely 9:17. We waited for the Okayama-bound passengers to disembark, stepped aboard, and went directly to the restaurant car. We had just been seated when the train began to pull out of the station, on schedule to the second. In the next four and a half hours the Shinkansen would average a hundred and fifty miles an hour, unless one of the frequent earthquakes brought us to an automatic safety stop.

Ueki and I ordered the same breakfast—juice, toast, ham and eggs, and black coffee.

He finished first, leaned back, and lit a cigarette. "Mr. Brent, it was very decent of you to make this trip. It is a typical Japanese gesture, and Doi-san will always be in your debt."

"It was decent of you too, Inspector. What I can't understand is why Doi-san would permit a foreigner to be involved in his personal problems."

Ueki smiled. "He tells me that you bear your own sorrows with dignity, and that he thinks you are brave to live in a land where almost everyone is a stranger to you. Doi-san thinks you have a strong character."

I paid the checks, ignoring Ueki's protests, and we found adjacent places in a non-reserved seating section. Ueki told me that Doi had been in the Japanese Imperial Army during the war, serving as a cook during the China campaign. He had been beaten severely by his lieutenant when he became ill while watching some of the outrages in Nanking.

There was nothing to say. Ueki dozed. I sat with my eyes closed and lost myself in the past.

Detective Okamoto, Ueki's friend, met us at the station with word that the situation at Narita was serious. Air traffic had not been interrupted, but several thousand demonstrators had been massed since morning at one of the chain-link outer security fences.

Siren wailing, we swerved and dodged our way through Tokyo's traffic and out to the highway leading to Narita. A trip that normally takes nearly an hour by air-terminal bus took us thirty minutes.

I saw them at the same time I heard them—thousands of angry men carrying homemade shields, foreheads bound with white strips of cloth to show their dedication. They held lengths of chain, pipes, clubs, and, most ominously, kerosene-filled bottles.

The security forces were in place: additional thousands of equally determined men, silent in disciplined ranks. They wore riot helmets with protective plexiglass visors, holding their professionally made rectangular shields slung over one arm. Many were equipped with tear-gas launchers, and all had long, stout truncheons.

Okamoto ran to join his command while Ueki and I walked to a cluster of reporters and television cameramen behind a row of parked police cars.

On cue from their group leaders, each screaming through a bullhorn, the demonstrators surged against the fence. One section gave; rocks and other debris flew. The security forces rushed forward and we heard the dry crack of shield against shield. Truncheons swished. The two forces drew apart, leaving men from both sides lying on the ground.

Ueki had turned to tell me something when I saw it arcing through the

air toward us—a bottle of kerosene, wick ablaze, trailing thin black smoke. There was no time to shout a warning, and it landed to Ueki's right, bursting with a whooshing crump.

His clothes were in flames as I dragged him to the ground, smothering him against my body, rolling in the dirt, slapping at the flames with my hands. Then something struck me in the head.

It was painful but not serious. My left hand was swathed in a bandage and the right one had a few nasty blisters. What hurt most was the throbbing purple knot on my temple where the rock had scored. Ueki had lucked out with minor body burns and a few scorched places on his face.

For the return trip, he insisted on paying for reserved seats, and we caught the last westbound Shinkansen of the night. We sat silently for a while, and Ueki noticed that I was cradling my bandaged hand in the blistered one. "It hurts?"

"A little," I lied.

"Then we must partake of the best of old Japanese remedies." He signaled to one of the vendors pushing a cart of refreshments up the aisle. "*Sake o, kudasai. Ni hon.*" The individual plastic bottles of sake held about a half-pint each.

"*Kampai*," he said, lifting the bottle. Cheers. We sipped. The potent rice wine cut through the tensions of the day.

"We both saw many things today," Ueki said after a few minutes. "Just before that regrettable incident with the fire bomb, I was sure I had spotted Akira and some hoodlums I recognized from Okayama. What I learned I will tell to Doi-san and see if the money is returned." He drank the remainder of his sake. "For your part, Mr. Brent, what did you see?"

I considered. "It was almost like seeing a movie of two feudal samurai armies, Inspector. The battle cries, clubs used as swords, helmets, and shields. Two great forces in conflict, good and bad."

"Exactly so!" Ueki said, delighted. "Even our way of violence follows old traditions. As you may know, no private citizen in Japan can own a handgun or a rifle, and one must work very hard even to earn a hunting license which allows limited use of a shotgun. We find other ways nevertheless. The knife is our favorite weapon for homicide. Why are you laughing?"

"Because I've got proof that something as simple as a rock is still a good

weapon," I replied, touching the knot on my head with my unbandaged hand.

"So *desu*." That's right. "You may have saved my life today, Mr. Brent, and, like Doi-san, I am in your debt."

I bought the next round.

The dining car had already closed when we boarded the late train, so Ueki suggested we go to his home to eat. I was startled. Friendships develop slowly in Japan, and an invitation to a man's home is a considerable honor. My polite objections to the imposition at such a late hour were overcome, and Ueki dropped a ten-yen coin into a pay phone to call his wife. We took a cab in front of the Okayama Station.

Mrs. Ueki stood on the step above the entranceway, distressed at the sight of our injuries. She took house slippers from a rack and placed them so we could step up into them easily, making small sounds of concern all the while.

Ueki introduced us, she welcomed me to their home, and I bowed my apologies for intruding upon their privacy. Ueki gave her a brief outline of what had happened at Narita.

He led the way to the family room, furnished in modern western, and we took seats next to each other on a large sofa. Mrs. Ueki, a diminutive, serene-looking woman with strands of white in her hair, brought an ice bucket from the kitchen and placed it next to a bottle and glasses on the coffee table. Ueki poured two light drinks of smooth Scotch.

I met her then. She didn't merely walk, she glided, and when she bowed to us from the sliding door with its panes of white paper, I thought of willow trees bending gracefully in a summer breeze.

"This is Noriko," Ueki said. "My daughter."

There was no need for me to stand to greet a woman, but I did, aware of the impression my battered body must have made. She bowed again, then looked up at me.

Lustrous cervine eyes to match the deerlike way she walked. Long glossy black hair. A voice like a caress. Shyly, she left us for the kitchen, returning with a plate of snacks—cold sliced octopus in vinegar, small dried fish, and *mikan*, mandarin oranges.

Mrs. Ueki politely called us to dinner. We took off our slippers and padded to the dining room, where the tatami mats were as clean as the day they were first put down. I was asked to sit in front of the tokonoma,

the spiritual hearth of the Japanese home—an alcove close to the short-legged table where we would eat. The only decorations were a gnarled, polished piece of cypress and a calligraphy scroll which hung on the wall above a vase of flowers.

"This is too much of an honor, Ueki-san," I pleaded. "I'll be uncomfortable sitting in your place."

"No, no, not at all." Ueki beamed, enjoying the role of generous host. "Please sit." I assumed the cross-legged position. Mrs. Ueki and Noriko placed the food on the table, apologizing repeatedly for its poor quality. Sashimi, sushi, boiled shrimp, tempura lotus roots, and salad.

It was a feast, and I directed my eyes toward Noriko whenever I thought I could without being noticed. She didn't look back. Ueki suggested brandy when we finished, but I declined. It had been a long day, I was bushed, and the knot on my head felt like a watermelon. "Just let me call a taxi," I said, "and I'll leave you to get some rest."

"Oh, we could never do that, Bulentu-san," Noriko said. I loved the way she pronounced my name. "You will be our guest tonight."

"Yes," Mrs. Ueki insisted. "And your bath is ready."

"If he has any trouble because of his hands, one of you will help," Ueki ordered.

I stammered my assurances of self-sufficiency all the way to the tile-floored bath, where I ladled, soaped, ladled, and then lowered myself into the sunken tub of steaming water, carefully keeping my bandage dry.

Later, when I crawled into the bedding Mrs. Ueki had unrolled for me in an upstairs room, I fell asleep instantly.

Our office had a backlog of details awaiting my attention. We had pioneered in bilingual computer printouts, and our hardware was being installed by a lot of industries exporting everything from salted fish to cassette recorders. Our equipment made it a lot easier to handle standardized business letters, invoices, and instructions in understandable English.

Several days passed before I was caught up, and I telephoned Ueki at his office to see when he wanted to meet. Yes, the bandage had come off—the hand looked good. Yes, this evening would be satisfactory. I went to the Tsushima Tei after stopping by the house to clean up.

I arrived first, and Mr. and Mrs. Doi were still thanking me for making the trip when Ueki came in. Doi relayed the information that Akira and

the money were still missing. "Do you wish to make formal charges against him?" Ueki asked.

"That would be shameful. Akira is my nephew."

"Well, do you need the money now, Doi-san?"

Doi bowed his head. "It would help. Our restaurant is small."

"I cannot promise you, but we may be able to get it back for you tonight," Ueki said. "You will accompany me again, Mr. Brent, won't you?"

In his car, driving past Okayama University, Ueki told me he had given a description of Akira to some of his men and asked them to keep the local members of the Dai Nippon Party under observation when they returned to Okayama.

Akira had been spotted two days later and had been followed to his girl friend's apartment.

The apartment building was one of the ubiquitous cinderblock structures that provided inexpensive housing for students and unmarried office workers. We parked by a decrepit-looking tobacco shop that was closed for the night. As we stood outside Apartment Six, we heard laughter from inside. Ueki knocked.

The girl who opened the door appeared to be in her early twenties. She was wearing the uniform of the modern generation—imitation jeans and faded denim shirt. Akira was sitting on the floor with a glass of beer in his hand.

"Get up, Akira-kun," Ueki snapped, flashing his identification card. The "kun" was a put-down—something like "sir," but used for people of obviously inferior social rank.

Akira, face twisted in anger, grabbed a beer bottle and leaped to his feet, swinging as he lunged at Ueki. Ueki stepped sideways and caught Akira in the throat with the edge of his hand. Akira dropped, gasping for breath. The girl cowered in a corner.

Ueki stared down at Akira. "There is a matter of one hundred thousand yen that you took from your uncle, Doi-san. I will have it from you tonight, and I am not particular about how I get it."

Akira, rubbing his throat, snarled. "Why is that stupid foreigner here?" Ueki leaned down, grabbed Akira by the front of his shirt, and slammed him against the wall, slapping his face repeatedly. "Because," he said, "this man is more loyal to your uncle than you are, has ten times the

courage of the scum who acted like barbarians at Narita, and is my friend as well. The money, Akira. Now."

Akira moaned. "*Hai*." Yes. He turned his face toward the girl and demanded her purse. She handed it to him, and he removed ten of the ten-thousand-yen bills.

"Where did you get the money?" Ueki demanded.

"She is secretary of the Dai Nippon Party in Okayama Prefecture, and I will have to repay it."

Ueki slapped him again and grinned. "That is welcome news. Perhaps they will ask for interest."

We left.

Doi and his wife were profoundly grateful for the return of the money, but the Tsushima Tei was filled with customers. We left with a promise to return when Doi had time to talk. I made only a few token protests when Ueki invited me to his home again.

This time Noriko greeted us. I made myself comfortable on the sofa while Ueki went to change clothes. Noriko was wearing a flowered house kimono. "Please, Bulentu-san," she asked demurely, "would you like to see my father's garden? It is very beautiful at night with the lanterns." It was small, with each component arranged to give that subtle look of natural imperfection so dear to the Japanese heart—perfect balance is artificial. There were a few bonsai trees in wooden planters, a number of large stones, and several dwarf cherry and plum trees. Ueki joined us, his sandals clapping on the pebbles.

"Ah, I see that Noriko has decided to boast about my humble garden."

"Yes, thankfully."

"And you like the way she looks? She wore the kimono just for you."

"*Hai, kawaii desu*." Yes, she's lovely. Noriko blushed.

"Indeed," Ueki agreed. "Both of my daughters are beautiful—just like their mother."

We had another of Mrs. Ueki's elaborate meals. A couple of hours later, the Uekis excused themselves and I sat talking to Noriko until the wee hours, learning everything I wanted to know about her. She was twenty-two, worked as a clerk at a bank, had a delightful, musical laugh—and no serious boy friends.

Our first outing together was another milestone. I had finally worked up the courage to drive a car in Japanese traffic. It was one of the smaller

models, which meant that I had to stoop, bend, and squeeze to get in and out. The first trip I took with Noriko was to the Myozenji Shrine, where we sat on a stone bench while I gave her the story of my life. When we departed, I left behind a lot of personal ghosts.

Several times a week we went to the Tsushima Tei, where the Doi would bow us in with smiles. Ueki would meet us whenever his schedule permitted and it became a family gathering.

Neither the inspector nor his wife commented on the amount of time Noriko spent with me, but I had reason to think they were pleased. When the television series *Shogun* was shown in the States, several Japanese stations carried delayed satellite relays. Ueki invited me for each session.

"This actor is playing a real person," Ueki told me. "His name was William Adams, an English navigator who came to Japan in 1600 aboard the *Charity*." He reached for a handful of cuttlefish. "Adams," he said, "was the man who helped bring Japan out of the era of feudal warfare. What he taught about gunnery, navigation, geography, and shipbuilding was the beginning of Japan's modern age of war technology."

He paused for a moment. "Sometimes I wish he had not done so. My father died on Iwo Jima."

There was a silence. "Mine," I said, "died in Korea."

"If it were not for beautiful women like myself," Noriko interrupted, "you men would never think about anything but war."

We laughed.

The call from Ueki came a little past midnight. "Doi's place," he said abruptly, "and hurry."

Four squad cars were parked in front when I arrived. Ueki and several officers were standing to the side of the doorway, service revolvers drawn. "Akira," Ueki explained. "He went in with a knife and forced the customers out. Now he has the Doi's in there alone."

"Damn it! If you go in, he might hurt them!"

"Yes, but we have no choice. Akira has been drinking heavily and he may decide to hurt them no matter what we do."

"Maybe we have a choice," I said. "That service entrance at the rear of the kitchen. If I go in alone, maybe I can distract him long enough for you to take him by surprise."

Ueki mulled it over. "If you go in, you go as a friend of Doi's. I cannot give you official approval."

"Understood."

I went to the back and pushed open the unlocked service door. Akira had an armlock on Doi and held a long broad-bladed knife in his other hand. His eyes were glassy and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

Mrs. Doi lay on the floor. I started to move toward her.

"Please do not come any closer," Doi pleaded. "She has only fainted, and he may injure you." There was no fear in his eyes, only sorrow—and, I thought, shame—shame for Akira.

"Not injure, kill!" Akira promised. "And if the police come in, both of you will die!"

"Akira—" I tried reasoning—"Inspector Ueki must do his duty. Your uncle has done you no harm."

"He has done me much harm!" Akira screamed. "He sent Inspector Ueki and you to spy on me at Narita."

"Not to spy, Akira," I said, keeping my distance, "but to see if he could get back your uncle's money. Your uncle would not have you arrested. He only agreed to let a friend try to work it out peacefully."

"Lies, all lies! This old fool would do anything to see the end of the Dai Nippon Party. He is afraid to have a strong Japan again. He should have been glad to give the money willingly, but instead he has for friends worthless policemen and foreigners."

"Let him go, Akira," I begged.

"Yes," Akira said, leering. "I will let him go." He buried the knife in Doi's chest.

Doi's eyes closed and he slumped silently to the floor.

"If you move, Akira," Ueki said from the doorway, "you are dead." His revolver was steadied on his left wrist, unwavering. Akira froze and Ueki walked to him, holstering the weapon. "So," Ueki said contemptuously, "here we have a great hero. A thief who steals from his uncle. A common murderer."

"Not a common murderer!" Akira shouted. "He was a traitor to Japan—to all of our traditions."

"So your life is dedicated to the old traditions, Akira?" Ueki asked sarcastically.

"Yes." He lifted his chin defiantly.

Ueki picked up a knife from the counter and handed it to Akira. "Very well. Then I will allow you the privilege of one of those old traditions."

I give to you the right of *seppuku*—honorable suicide. You have killed your noble lord, protector, and benefactor. Under such circumstances, a samurai was expected to take his own life. Please demonstrate your samurai courage for us.”

Akira, startled, looked first at me, then at Ueki. The knife clattered to the floor. He lowered his head and began sobbing into his hands.

“Take him away,” Ueki ordered.

Two officers handcuffed Akira and led him out to a squad car.

“Suppose he had killed himself?” I asked.

“I would have been dismissed. But there was no chance. His actions were those of a coward, and he will remain one until the day he is dragged to the gallows. Now let us help Mrs. Doi.”

Death travels with its own customs in every country, and we were faced with an emotional ordeal. Mrs. Ueki brought Noriko over to help comfort Mrs. Doi.

In the morning, Ueki took the death certificate he and the chief medical examiner had signed to the prefecture office and obtained permission for cremation and burial. Mrs. Doi told us that, aside from Akira, she had no close relatives, so Ueki made the arrangements.

That evening we began the *tsuya*, an all-night vigil. Doi’s body, washed and dressed by the women, lay upon his bedding surrounded by flowers. At daybreak we placed the body in a coffin, and Mrs. Doi put a small knife into her husband’s kimono sleeve as protection for his soul on its long journey.

“This too, Mrs. Doi,” I said softly. I unwrapped the sword Ueki had arrested me for carrying illegally and placed it alongside the body. “He was a brave man who thought of me when his own life was in danger.”

“Yes,” Ueki agreed, and I was surprised to see tears in his eyes.

Mrs. Doi made a farewell bow of respect to her husband, and each of us took turns symbolically nailing the lid with a ritual hammer. The hearse came and we followed it to the crematorium, where the coffin was placed before an altar while Buddhist priests chanted and made offerings of incense. At the end of the ceremony, the priests sprinkled our shoulders with purifying salt.

As we filed out, Noriko turned once more to the coffin, incredibly lovely as she bowed. “Sayonara, Doi-san,” she whispered.

Noriko and I were snuggled close on the sofa holding hands when we heard Ueki's car pull into the driveway: He walked into the room and glanced at us with no change of expression.

"So," he said, "what date have you chosen?"

"In May, Father," Noriko replied.

"That is, if we have your permission, Ueki-san," I said.

"I have only two demands, Mr. Brent," he said.

I waited, afraid to speak.

"One demand," he said, "is for Mrs. Ueki." He shouted toward the kitchen. "Wife, bring us that special bottle of Goldflake sake!"

Mrs. Ueki's face, crinkled with smiles, peered from behind the sliding door. "Hai!"

"The other demand?" Noriko asked.

"That one is for Mr. Brent." He looked at me. "Call me Toshiko. Sam."

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 1930 • Marion, OH 43305

New Subscribers Only.

☐ Send me 7 issues of EQMM for Only \$7.97!
(a savings of \$1.48 off the newsstand price)

☐ Double my savings—14 issues for \$15.94!

☐ Payment of \$ _____ enclosed.

☐ Bill me later.

Outside U.S.A. and possessions:
7 issues \$9.16 14 issues \$18.33

☐ Charge to my ☐ VISA ☐ Master Charge

Card #

Expiration Date: _____

Your Signature: _____

(Only the 14 issues for \$15.94 can be charged to your bank cards.)

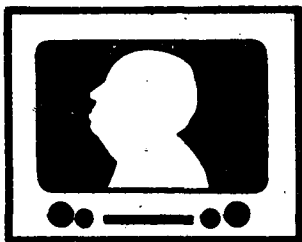
Your name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.

D1FC3-9



CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

“You are *murderer*.” The somber, heavy-lidded eyes of the stocky, authoritative Oriental searches the group of cowed suspects. “Truth like treasure buried in snow—sooner or later must come to surface.” This ritualistic naming of the killer occurs with some variations in more than three dozen mystery films celebrating the exploits of a detective whose screen career is second only to Sherlock Holmes, and the only major American cinema sleuth decidedly not of Anglo-Saxon origins. Inspector Charlie Chan of the Honolulu Police Department, Chinese-Hawaiian-American, has been a revered figure in international screen crime for over five decades.

American novelist Earl Derr Biggers had spent time on the island of Hawaii and heard stories of a celebrated local police chief, Chang Apana, who tempered a reputation for wisdom by keeping order on Waikiki Beach with a bullwhip! Biggers had written mysteries—including the popular *Seven Keys to Baldpate*—and was searching for a novel new sort of detective. Villainous Orientals had already become “old stuff” as a melodrama stereotype, but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order had never been used, he thought. *The House Without a Key*—in which a wise, thoughtful Honolulu policeman named Chan investigates a murder in an open-walled Waikiki bungalow (the site actually exists, and today is a pub on the beach of the Halekulani Hotel)—published in 1925, became an instant success, and historian Howard Haycraft notes that Charlie Chan’s personal popularity played an important part in the Renaissance of the American detective story.

Biggers wrote five more Chan novels before his death in 1933, but the transition of his work to the screen was not immediate. Pathe made a serial out of *The House Without a Key* in 1925, full of explosions, car chases, frenzied cliffhanger action, but very little Chan—included mainly for comedy, and twelfth in cast billing. (He was played by Japanese actor George Kuwa.) Next filmed was *The Chinese Parrot* (1925), but changed by the moody, shadow-mad German emigré director Paul Leni into a dark occult tale of cursed jewels, with the impassive Japanese Sojin as Chan. In 1929, the Fox Studio wrestled with *Behind That Curtain*, concentrating on the illicit love affair of the novel and bringing Chan in only at the end (the English actor E. L. Park, who looked very Chanlike) to set things right by shooting the villain. The film was reasonably well produced and successful, moving the studio to dare adapting yet another Biggers book but giving the detective his due.

Two years later, in *Charlie Chan Carries On*—going so far as even keeping the detective's name in the title—Fox cast as Chan the Swedish character actor Warner Oland, who had long in Hollywood portrayed Fu Manchu and other Asiatic menaces, back into the days of the silents opposite Pearl White. Troubled by his contributions to this stereotype, Oland welcomed the new role and identified closely with it—in later years embracing members of a Chinese convention as “my people,” for instance. Even though Fox hedged its bet a bit by introducing Chan somewhat towards the end of the round-the-world murder cruise which the film relates, he was a great success, and the golden age of the Chan films began its course.

A combination of intriguing mysteries contrasted with the philosophical Chan's endearing domestic lifestyle made his films lastingly popular. At first Chan's cases occur in Honolulu—as in *The Black Camel*, in which a famed actress is murdered on location near Diamond Head (the “black camel” of the title is Death)—but the settings soon shift to the U.S. mainland, and starting with *Charlie Chan in London* (1934) the detective begins an endless international journey to study foreign criminology and attend police conventions, allowing him to tackle murder *everywhere*. *Charlie Chan in Egypt* is steeped in eerie atmosphere, as Chan discovers a mummy just excavated from an ancient tomb has a bullet in its chest. The films in the series were up to the minute: *Charlie Chan at the Olympics* (1937) used footage of the Berlin Olympics the year before, constructing an interesting mystery around it. Chan's son Lee is a member

of the American swimming team, and the detective crosses the Atlantic by dirigible. At the conclusion of the plot—involving spies, murder, and abduction—the crack German police grudgingly confess their admiration for Chan.

Other interesting locales for the Chan series included Shanghai, Reno, Monte Carlo, and New York's Broadway; the detective investigated sudden death at the circus and at the opera (stalking a Mephistophelian Boris Karloff in an opera especially composed for the film by Oscar Levant). In 1938 Warner Oland died, and Stanley Toler was cast in the role, playing the detective in his greatest screen case the following year: *Charlie Chan at Treasure Island*. The film had little to do with the Treasure Island Exhibition of that year off the California coast; instead, Chan tries to unmask a psychic known as Dr. Zodiac who blackmails victims and drives them to suicide. A nightclub sequence in which a magician's assistant (Pauline Moore), in a trance, hysterically "sees" the identity of the murderer is chilling, and only one turn in a very twisting case—despite its being merely a series film, it is one of the screen's very best whodunits.

In the years following, Chan went on to find murder in Paris, Rio, the Panama Canal, a San Francisco wax museum. No poison dart, electric bolt, or other unique murder device kept the detective from his dogged, methodical pursuit, his sage aphorisms ("It is foolish mouse who nests in cat's ear"), his loving parental reproofs to his overeager, Americanized oldest sons, and ultimately his traditional round-up of suspects. By 1942 Fox decided to suspend all its detective series, Chan included, but two years later he turned up—again played by Toler—at Monogram, a smaller studio. There was a lessening of quality, and certainly of budget, as Monogram carried on (Roland Winters taking over after Toler's death in 1946), but even these last years had their interesting contributions. In one film a medium at a seance is killed by a bullet made with poisoned blood. In another film a prison is headquarters for forged fingerprints of dead convicts. An early television studio is the setting for multiple murder. But as the Monogram series progressed Chan's solutions became more perfunctory, less satisfying, until one almost felt he was saying "You are murderer" without bothering to tell *why*. The final film in the series, *Sky Dragon* (1949), has a murder happen aboard a passenger plane—actually an airborne locked-room puzzle of sorts, and a good way to finish.

J. Carroll Naish played the detective briefly in an early television series, Peter Sellers parodied Chan in *Murder by Death*, and more recently a

Saturday-morning cartoon show featured *The Chan Clan*—the Chan offspring wised up and on their own, but with Keye Luke supplying the voice of Dad. The release of the original films to television brought Chan to a vast new audience, but in some major cities Chinese-American protest groups forced the series off the air—claiming the Chan character, played by white actors with taped slanted eyes, fortune-cookie dialogue, subservient image, and inscrutable manner, a degrading racist stereotype rather than an ethnic treasure.

In 1972 Universal produced a Chan mystery set aboard a pleasure yacht in Toronto harbor with Ross Martin of *The Wild, Wild West* as the detective, a two-hour film for television. It was talky, slow-moving, but intelligent; whether because of its static plot or organized protests, the film has had only late-night exposure and been buried in syndication. Charlie's cinematic career seemed over.

Then, this year, the distinguished Peter Ustinov, fresh from his triumphant Hercule Poirot, was selected to portray Chan in a high-budget new feature, *Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen*. Good news, indeed! What could be better than ingredients like a baffling series of murders (BIZARRE KILLER STRIKES AGAIN, reads an opening newspaper headline), intriguing death devices ("Don't people shoot each other with guns any more?" moans the police chief), and exotic locations—in this case stunning backdrops of San Francisco filmed in color, the first Chan theatrical feature not in black-and-white.

Alas, while it has some funny moments, the film is too determinedly camp, and while the earlier Chan movies never shied from comedy relief, the mysteries were always deadly serious, and this one is not. Ustinov—like the rest of the cast—is excellent. He snorts and squints and mutters (his guttural reading of "Most regrettable" is classic), and does his best with rather listless aphorisms—"Experience good school, but sometimes fees high" is an example. However, he has nothing really to solve, the murders are so foolish. One longs to see him in a proper Chan vehicle, and actually one *does*, as the climax takes place in part in a San Francisco revival theater where old Chan movies are playing. He must pursue the killer by running across the stage in front of the screen, where behind him the screen Chan (Ustinov again) in a black-and-white scene begins the time-honored ritual of gathering the suspects. This recreation is done straight and outshines the rest of the movie. For that one inspired moment, the *real* Charlie Chan would certainly have said: "Thank you—so much."

Classified MARKET PLACE

ALFRED HITCHCOCK is published 13 times a year. The rate for CLASSIFIED Ads is \$1.15 per word payable in advance—minimum ad \$17.25. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Director, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

TEN Clues to MAGNIFICENT LIVING \$5.00, including 60% dealership. Common-sense Books, Box 287-D3, Redford, MA 01730.

EXTRA income in Health-Nutrition. Bonus Program, new car. Details: Golden, Rt. 2, Box 392D, Fair Grove, MO 65648.

FREE. Honestly Get Rich Gold Nutrition. Rare Exposed Trade Secrets. SASE. Sterling, P.O. Box 6631, 23703.

AUTO PARTS & ACCESSORIES

NEW carburetor book. 100+ MPG carburetors. Free information. Carbu, Route 1B, Hitchcock, SD 57348.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

"SECRET 200 MPG Carburetor Revealed!!!" Free Details! MPG-DPC 681, Box 2133, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

AVIATION

ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION DEVICE! Free Brochure. RDA, Box 873, Concord, NC 28025.

BLUEPRINTS, PATTERNS & PLANS

NEW CRAFT PRINT CATALOG—Choose from over 100 great easy-to-build plans. Send \$1.25 (completely refunded with your first order). BOAT BUILDER, (CP Div.)—380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE CATALOGUES, hardbacks, paperbacks. Search Service, Detective Mystery Booksearch, Box 15460, Orlando, Florida 32808.

FREE List! Used hardcover mystery detective fiction. Bill Dunn, 251 Baldwin Avenue, Meriden, CT 06450.

LARGE Catalog Free: Mystery-suspense books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 15665, Santa Ana, CA 92705.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

SEND for free list of mystery and suspense hardcover books: Reader's Roost, 109 Long Ave., Hillside, NJ 07205.

BRITISH paperbacks. Send for Free catalog to Books International, Box 523, Southampton, Bermuda.

SEARCH SERVICE: Catalogs Issued. Mystery — Detective — Suspense — Speculative — Fantasy Fiction. First Editions, Reprints. Hardcover-paper. Mystery And Imagination Bookshop, P.O. Box A-H, Covina, CA 91722.

BLACK CAT Mystery Magazine. \$8/year. March Chase Publishing, P.O. Box 279, Station M, Toronto, Canada M6S 4T3.

INFORMATIVE BOOKLET—"How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad. Send \$1.75 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

FREE BOOK "2042 Unique Proven Enterprises." Fabulous "unknowns," second inflation income. Haylings-E12, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

STAY HOME! EARN BIG MONEY addressing envelopes. Genuine offer 10¢. Lindco, 3636-DA, Peterson, Chicago 60659.

MAILORDER opportunity! Start profitable home business without experience or capital. Write for free book and details. No obligation. Gil Turk, Dept. 17, Montvale, NJ 07645.

1000% Profit Bronzing or Chinakoting Baby Shoes. Free Exciting Details: NBC, Box 1904-DB, Sebring, FL 33870.

\$200. up Weekly. No sellings. Super Home Business. Repeat Orders Monthly. Plastico, Box 104AH, Hubertus WI 53033.

ADDRESS—Mail Commission circulars at home! Be flooded with offers!! Offer-details rush stamped addressed envelope & 25¢ service fee. Schneider Enterprises, Dept. M, 96 Lincoln, Crystal Lake, IL 60014.

Classified Continued

DO IT YOURSELF

GROW Your Own Culinary Delights, Exotic Mushrooms. Free instructions, recipes, drying instructions. Deluxe Kit \$6.98. Anna's Gourmet Mushrooms, 230 Frankline, Waupun, WI 53963.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D.s... Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-AH-6, Tustin, CA 92680.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$1.75 (25¢ postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

JOURNEYMAN LEGITIMATE CREDENTIALS GRANTED! Write: National Craftsmen Union, 210 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1102, New York, NY 10010.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly, Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1855 G.P.O., New York, NY 10001.

HOBBIES & COLLECTIONS

GREAT MYSTERY SHOWS from radio's golden era. On cassettes, fine sound, moderately priced. All your favorites. Free list. Rare Radio, Dept. H, Box 117, Sunland, CA 91040.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

LOANS BY MAIL

GET cash grants—from Government. (Never repay.) Also, cash loans available. All ages eligible. Complete information, \$2 (refundable). Surplus Funds-DC, 1629 K St., Washington, DC 20006.

"BORROW by mail! Signature loans. No collateral! Free Details. Write MBG-DFC681, Box 2298, Sandusky, OH 44870.

BORROW \$1,000-\$50,000 secretly—"overnight." Anyone! Credit unimportant. Repay anytime. Incredibly low interest. No interviews, collateral, cosigners. Unique "Financier's Plan." Full information, \$2 (refundable). Spectrum, 120 Wall St.-16, New York 10005.

LOANS BY MAIL—Cont'd

QUICK \$CASH\$ SIGNATURE LOANS! Advise amount & purpose. Details Free. FLITE, Box 454-DG, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

MAGIC TRICKS, JOKER NOVELTIES & PUZZLES

MAKE YOUR CARD TABLE RISE on two legs. No trickery. Detailed Instructions \$2.00. Mystique, Box 104AH, Hubertus, WI 53033.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY . . . NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

MEET sincere, beautiful people—like YOU. Very low fees. Call DATELINE toll-free: 800-451-3245.

SAVE! Fabulous Gems For Jewelry, Collecting! Gemcutter to You! Details Free. Taylor's, 113-A Martin, Indian Harbor Beach, FL 32937.

CHOCOLATE Mayonnaise Cake, delicious and very moist. \$1.00, sase to Lynda Wright, 112 N. Pine, Washington, IL 61571.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

\$45,000 POSSIBLE in three weeks! Send self-addressed stamped envelope to: T. H. Krodell, 4196 Baden Strasse, Jasper, IN 47546.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad. Send \$1.75 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

1000% Profit Bronzing or Chinakoting Baby Shoes. Free Exciting Details: NBC, Box 1904-DB, Sebring, FL 33870.

GUARANTEE \$500 profit per thousand envelopes stuffed. Free info. Details-AH, P.O. Box 80094, Baton Rouge, LA 70898.

RECEIVE \$10.00—Keep \$9.50! Receive \$25.00—Keep All! Write: George Greater, 1533 Ash, Detroit, MI 48208.

EXTRA MONEY! Make money with your ideas. New report reveals how you can get paid for just thinking. Rush \$2.00 JOMARO Enterprises, Dept. 2, 3010 Abelia Ct., San Jose, CA 95121.

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN \$45,000 IN THREE WEEKS—GUARANTEED. Send self-addressed stamped envelope to Kevin Kemmerer, 402C Warren St., Blacksburg, VA 24060.

EARN Extra Money From Home! Easy Work! Start Immediately! Write: Dayh, Box 89, Licking, MO 65542.

"SAVE OVER \$30 IN POSTAGE! We will list you over 300 firms. Receive all types of money making offers." Send \$2.00 to C. Grossman, 1810 Louis Ln., Hastings, MN 55033.

ACHIEVE WHATEVER YOU WANT. Report \$2. Winnex, 821 North Main 116X, Belton, TX 76513.

2000% Possible Selling Money Making Reports. Free Details. Johnson Co., 830 Auman Drive, Carmel, IN 46032 DP-1.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

REFUNDING? COUPONING? Just Starting? Discouraged? Save 90%!! Guaranteed!! How? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DC3, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

WHAT'S going on in housing? Get advice on how to economize in modernizing or improving or adding space from idea to completion. Working blueprints available. Send \$1.50 for 110 Better Building Plans to: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New-York, NY 10017.

OLD GOLD WANTED

BUYING Gold, Silver, Platinum, any form! Information write: American Metals, Box 3009, Charleston, SC 29407.

MOTION PICTURE PROJECTORS. FILMS. SLIDES AND SUPPLIES

BREATHTAKING Glamour Slides, Classic Nudes. Catalog, six samples, \$3.00. Photographic Place, Box 806-AH, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

PERSONAL

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D.s . . . Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-DP6, Tustin, CA 92680.

HAVE CONFIDENTIAL CHICAGO MAILING ADDRESS or branch office. Business, Personal; Since 1944! Mail Center, 323 (g) Franklin, Chicago 60606.

SINGLES? Worldwide Introductions. Meet "new" singles. World, Box 685-HIT, Hemet, CA 92343.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

LEARN ABOUT FRIENDS, LOVERS! Handwriting reveals personality. Sample, \$5 money order to Graphology, Box 27085, Milwaukee, WI 53227.

BECOME A Legally Ordained Minister. Free Details. ULC-DPM681, Box 2133, Sandusky, OH 44870.

FILIPINO LADIES SEEK MARRIAGE, FRIENDSHIP. \$2.00 details, Photos. Sampa-guita, Box 742, Jasper, IN 47546.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$16.98 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1855 G.P.O., New York, NY 10001.

NO more money worries. Find yourself in the flow. Send stamped self-addressed envelope for free details. NICHOLS, 24 Joralemon, B'klyn, NY 11201.

VEGETARIAN gourmet cookbook, only \$4.95. Trude, Box 7087-AH, Burbank, CA 91505. All-natural VITAMIN catalog, 25¢.

ASTROLOGY: Your personal Sun-Sign guide, \$3.75. Mail Order-Variety Store, P.O. Box 5614V, Buena Park, CA 90620.

SINGLE? WIDOWED? DIVORCED? Nationwide introductions! Hundreds of members! Identity, Box 315-DC, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!!! Make your own S & M Densitometer. Send \$5.00 for detailed drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S & M Instruments, Dept. AH6, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

RADIO & TELEVISION

CABLE TV DESCRAMBLERS and CONVERTERS. MICROWAVE antennas and downconverters. Plans and parts. Build or buy. For information send \$2.00. C&D Company, P.O. Box 21, Jenison, MI 49428.

RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

Detach here and return coupon to

New Subscribers Only.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Box 1933 • Marion, Ohio 43305

☐ 6 issues for just \$6.97 (I save over \$2.00)

☐ Payment enclosed

☐ Bill me

☐ 12 issues for just \$13.94 (I save over \$4.00)

☐ Payment enclosed

☐ Bill me

☐ Charge it to my ☐ VISA card ☐ Master Charge

Credit

Card #

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Signature

Expiration date

Outside U.S.A. & Possessions (cash or credit card only)

☐ 6 issues—\$8.00

☐ 12 issues—\$16.00

Name (please print)

Address

City

State

Zip

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.

D1FC4-7



Come, Explore with Us... and DISCOVER

Join thousands of SF aficionados in our monthly voyages to the outer limits of imagination.

Enjoy 176 pages packed with 10-15 stories by favorite authors like Avram Davidson,

Larry Niven, Barry Longyear, James

Gunn, Jo Clayton, Jack C. Halde-

man II, Joan S. Vinge, A. Bertram

Chandler (and Isaac Asimov, too)!

**SUBSCRIBE
NOW AND
SAVE OVER
\$4.00**

Every story and feature in **ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE** is reviewed by an editorial board according to Dr. Asimov's principles for good SF—so the fiction you get every month is always provocative, unusual, but with a sense of reality that makes you wonder. . . .
“Could it be . . .?”

GET AWAY WITH MURDER.

GET \$111.40 WORTH OF MACDONALD, CHARTERIS, JOHNSTON

AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR \$1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for \$1.

You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil, terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

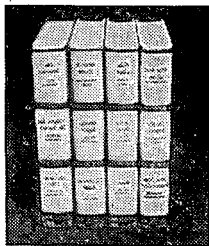
Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost \$111.40. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown on the left for only \$1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, full-length detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only \$7.49. That's about \$2.50 per mystery—at least \$5 (and sometimes \$7 or \$8) less than just one costs in the publishers' original editions.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured here, plus Len Deighton, Dick Francis and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 12 mysteries. Send the coupon today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.

FILL OUT COUPON. CLIP ALONG DOTTED LINE—THEN MAIL



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all four volumes for the special new member price of only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly Preview, which describes my next selections but I am not obligated to accept them. I will always have at least ten days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book sent for full credit within 21 days. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only \$7.49 plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

D23L2L

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

1-PN

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only; offer slightly different in Canada.

GET AWAY WITH MURDER

GET 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR \$1.

P.D. JAMES **INNOCENT BLOOD** NORTHVERNS

WICKED DESIGNS O'DONNELL ETHAN

ROBERT L. DUNCAN
BRIMSTONE

Bombship

Bill Knox CRIME CLUB

MURDER IN THE WHITE HOUSE
MARGARET FREEMAN ARROW HOUSE

Pentecost Beware Young Lovers ARROW

SIMENON **MAIGRET'S RIVAL** ARROW

Westlake **CASTLE IN THE AIR** ARROW

Leslie Charteris **THE SAINT AND
THE TEMPLAR TREASURE** CRIME CLUB SELECTION

THE GREEN RIPPER

JOHN D.
MacDONALD ARROW

Mignon G.
Eberhart

Casa
Madrone ARROW

A Presence in an Empty Room DODD MEAD

See inside cover for details.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED